THE AGED SOUTH:
OLD AGE AND ROOTS MUSIC IN THE US SOUTH, 1900-1945

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates experiences and representations of old age and ageing in roots music of the US South from 1900-1945. During this period, aged musicians and depictions of old age were commonplace in southern roots music. This dissertation assesses the meanings and functions of age and ageing in southern roots music in the context of the drastic economic, technological, political, social, racial, and cultural changes and tensions in the early twentieth century South. This study proposes that the production of ideas about old age in southern roots music figured into a range of anxieties about the modernising 'New South', and a corresponding nostalgia for the 'Old South'.

This dissertation posits that the proliferation of older people and ideas about 'elders' in roots music also reflected and impacted on some of the realities and beliefs about the changing age demographics and generational dynamics of the era, such as those relating to life expectancy, retirement, pensions, and an evolving sense of 'age consciousness'. Employing a multi- and interdisciplinary approach, this dissertation revaluates roots music and southern history with new analytical frameworks from the fields of medical humanities and age studies, with a particular focus on how issues of debility, disability, and ageism intersect with other power structures.

This dissertation adds the category of age to a growing literature on the cultural significances of early roots music and the mass media by analysing a range of textual, visual, and aural primary sources and synthesising secondary research to explore the age dimension of five domains of southern roots music: old fiddlers' contests; aged musicians in the broadcasting and recording industries; 'age masquerade' on 'barn dance' radio; representations of old age on commercial 'old-time' and 'race' recordings; and folklorists John and Alan Lomax's research for the Library of Congress into African American music.

Table of Contents

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appreciation for its importance. Over the years, my lifelong friend Tom and my brother Jonathan have inspired my musical tastes and encouraged me onwards with my research, and both deserve my gratitude. Equally formative to my thinking for this dissertation was my experience as an oral history project worker at Eastside Community Heritage. I remain indebted to Judith Garfield and all the staff for what I learnt during my time there.

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Last, but not least, and with absolutely no bitterness, this dissertation is dedicated to that unnamed audience member who came up to me after a concert of my blues combo in the early 2010s to tell me that he liked the band, but thought I was 'too young to play the blues'.

I hope this clears things up.

Candidate Declaration

I declare that all the work contained in this dissertation has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas and contributions from the work of others.

Any ethical clearance for the research presented in this commentary has been approved. Approval has been sought and granted by the Faculty Ethics Committee on 19 September 2017.

I declare that the word count of this dissertation is 85,022 words.

Name: Simon Henry Buck

Signature:

Date: 30 September 2019

Introduction

In the months leading up to President Franklin D. Roosevelt signing the Social Security Act into law on 14 August 1935, five seemingly unconnected musical performances occurred in the southern United States. On the 21 January, a young African American vocal quartet, the Mississippi Mud Mashers, walked into a recording session in New Orleans, Louisiana to wax a humorous song entitled 'Bring It On Home To Your Grandma' for the Bluebird label (Bluebird B-5845). Three months later, on a Saturday night in Nashville, Tennessee, 65-year-old retiree Uncle Dave Macon played his banjo on local radio station WSM's rural-oriented programme, the *Grand Ole Opry*. On 10 May, the 32-year-old entertainer Henry Warren dressed up as an old man, donning a grey wig and walking cane to become 'Uncle' Henry at a concert in a high school in McKinney, Kentucky. One month later, three folklorists conducting research on St. Simons Island off the Georgia coast recorded the 87-year-old ex-slave Wallace Quarterman singing a spiritual that dated back to Reconstruction. Finally, on 6 July in Marlin, Texas, the last surviving Confederate veterans of Falls County enjoyed an 'old fiddlers' contest' between mostly elderly competitors. This dissertation shows that these performances, and many more like them across the South in the first half of the twentieth century, were part of a wider phenomenon in which the aged and ideas about old age became embedded in southern roots music, and ultimately, became a significant, if historically neglected element in US popular music.[1]

These 'grey-haired' domains of southern roots music, particularly those relating to old fiddlers' contests, commercial and folkloric recordings, and radio broadcasting, were

[1] 'Holt Pinch Hits For Hay', *Nashville Tennessean*, 21 April 1935, 4; 'McKinney', *Interior Journal* [Stanford, Kentucky], 10 May 1935, 1; Alan Lomax, Zora Neale Hurston, Mary Elizabeth Barnicle and Wallace Quarterman, 'Interview with Wallace Quarterman, Fort Frederica, St. Simons Island, Georgia, June 1935 (part 2 of 2)', June 1935, AFC 1935/001, Lomax Collections, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, Washington D.C., available at www.loc.gov/item/afc1935001_afs00342b/, accessed 11 June 2019; 'Old Settlers and Confederate Vets Planning Reunion', *Waco Tribune-Herald*, 7 July 1935, 2.

shaped by three broad historical contexts. First, a wave of demographic, political, and cultural developments changed how southerners, and Americans generally, experienced, understood, and represented old age and ageing. The early-to-mid twentieth century saw an absolute and relative increase in the number of elderly Americans. In 1900, approximately 4.1 percent of the national population was aged 65 years or older; by 1950, this figure had risen to 8.2 percent.[2] This 'longevity revolution' was matched by the development of the institution of retirement, which became a reality for a larger proportion of the public, rather just a privileged few.[3] These decades also saw a wave of pension campaigns organised for and by older Americans, most notably Civil War veterans' organisations, the Fraternal Order of Eagles, Abraham Epstein's American Association for Old Age Security, and the Townsend Plan movement led by Dr. Francis Townsend.[4] Finally, in 1935, the Social Security Act laid the groundwork for the first federal programme for old age welfare that, although only gradually and unevenly implemented, at least began to address seriously and, in some cases, alleviate age-based poverty and insecurity.[5] Age scholars have shown that these different, yet interacting historical trajectories helped establish some new ideas about the aged as a well-defined, categorisable population with its own set of characteristics, needs, problems, and rights. This dissertation adds to this growing literature by suggesting that the peculiar 'age consciousness' of the period also bled into the world of southern roots

[2] Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970, Part 1* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975), 10.
[3] For the 'longevity revolution', see W. Andrew Achenbaum, 'Delineating Old Age: From Functional Status to Bureaucratic Criteria', in *Age in America: The Colonial Era to the Present*, ed. Nicholas L. Syrett and Corinne T. Field (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 301. For the development of retirement in the US, see Gregory Wood, *Retiring Men: Manhood, Labor, and Growing Old in America, 1900-1960* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2012).
[4] For the development of these different campaigns, see Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995); Edwin Amenta, *When Movements Matter: The Townsend Plan and the Rise of Social Security* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006). As Anthony Badger argues, 'old people were organised into a visible pressure group for the first time': Anthony J. Badger, *The New Deal: The Depression Years, 1933-1940*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), 229.
[5] The Social Security Act (Act of August 14, 1935) [H. R. 7260] featured several provisions not related to age, but two titles, Old Age Insurance (OAI) and Old Age Assistance (OAA), were explicitly linked to providing financial security for the elderly.

music, and, reciprocally, that ideas about age in southern roots music helped to solidify them as new norms in the popular consciousness.[6]

The second significant historical context that explains the presence of the 'aged South' in roots music is the frequently vexed relationship between the South and modernity. The early twentieth century South was characterised by the gradual but tangible processes of industrialisation, urbanisation, mechanisation, and a series of challenges to the hierarchies of race, gender, class, and religion. To varying degrees, these disruptions challenged the traditional power structures of what had been a predominantly racialised, patriarchal, rural, and devout southern society since the antebellum era. Many southerners, and Americans in general, expressed feelings of anxiety, loss, and anger about the modern times in which they lived, just as much as some did their curiosity, excitement, and optimism. This dissertation posits that an occasionally messy configuration of these sentiments inclined many contemporaries to attach emotionally charged meanings to aged southerners. Elders, at least in roots music, came to symbolically represent, and sometimes literally endorse, the kinds of old-fashioned, agrarian values and southern ways of life that many feared, correctly or not, to be under threat of extinction in the modern world.

The third significant environment in this dissertation is the new world of music making and consumption in the early twentieth century. The recognisable 'newness' of this modern musical epoch revolved around advancements in new sound and communication technologies, particularly phonograph recording and radio broadcasting. This dissertation reveals that, in the throes of this era of seismic changes to how Americans produced,

[6] Howard P. Chudacoff contends that age stratification in US society become more complex in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries leading to a greater awareness of age gradings in everyday life: Howard P. Chudacoff, *How Old Are You?: Age Consciousness in American Culture* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992), 4-6.

promoted, enjoyed, and preserved music, there existed a corresponding appetite for old musicians and 'old age imaginaries'.[7]

Related to this epochal technological shift was the evolution of new strains of the musical culture, particularly mediatised 'roots music'. For the purposes of this study, this umbrella term encompasses three broadly discernible, but frequently overlapping, genres: 'old-time music', 'race music', and 'folk music'. Old-time music was a contemporary marketing phrase from the early 1920s used to describe the rural-orientated style of music associated with working-class white southerners, and was later rebranded 'hillbilly' in the 1930s, and finally 'country music' from the 1940s onwards. As well as being released on phonograph records, radio stations also broadcast old-time music, especially through a new programming format called 'barn dance radio'.[8] Similarly, whole networks of live events, including fiddlers' contests, also sprung up and worked with and against the new mass media.

Much like the nostalgic depictions of a sanitised Old South also floating around in early twentieth century US culture, old-time music frequently disseminated an idea of a southern past that was profoundly white, patriarchal, God-fearing and rural. Unsurprisingly, these imagined pasts became strong and more ubiquitous in response to some of the contemporary 'crises' of the modernising South: heightening racial tensions, a growing sense of male emasculation at home and at work, and economic and technological modernisation. Though these tensions were present across the country, they were felt with particular potency in the South and came to dominate national, even international imaginings

[7] For 'old age imaginaries', see Chris Gilleard and Paul Higgs, 'Studying Dementia: The Relevance of the Fourth Age', *Quality in Ageing and Older Adults* 15, no. 4 (2014): 241-243.

[8] Country music scholars generally concur on the use of the term 'barn dance radio', though others use 'rural radio': Kristine M. McCusker, *Lonesome Cowgirls and Honky Tonk Angels: The Women of Barn Dance Radio* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008); Bill C. Malone, *Don't Get Above Your Raisin': Country Music and the Southern Working Class* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2005); Archie Green, 'Hillbilly Music: Source and Symbol', *Journal of American Folklore* 78, no. 309 (1965): 204-228.

of the region.[9] The increasingly culturally prominent 'hillbilly' icon - a white working-class southerner simultaneously disparaged and admired for being torn between traditional values and modern lifestyle - embodied many of these complex feelings.[10] This dissertation shows that the 'old hillbilly' became an icon in its own right.

'Race music' was also a constructed marketing category, but one that instead sold primarily to a growing consumer base of African Americans and capitalised on a wider marketability of ostensibly 'black' musics, including blues, jazz, spirituals, and gospel. A range of racialised tropes and racist industry practices became associated with race music. Yet race music, like old-time music, was routinely connected to the South in the popular imagination and the marketing strategies that shaped it.[11] 'Folk music' is a term that could entail Appalachian fiddle tunes and mountain ballads as much as plantation hollers and

[9] For studies on nostalgia within regional and national culture for the 'moonlight and magnolia' of the Old South, particularly the 'Plantation South' and the 'Mountain South', see Karen L. Cox, *Dreaming of Dixie: How the South Was Created in American Popular Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013); W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005); William Blair, *Contesting the Memory of the Civil War in The South, 1865-1914* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory*, Second Edition (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2002); Daniel J. Anderson, 'Nostalgia for Christmas in Postbellum Plantation Reminiscences', *Southern Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal of the South* 21, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2014): 39-74.

[10] For the hillbilly icon in US popular culture, see Anthony Harkins, *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); J. W. Williamson, *Hillbillyland: What the Movies Did to the Mountains and What the Mountains Did to the Movies* (Chapel Hill: University North Carolina Press, 1995); Archie Green, 'Hillbilly Music: Source and Symbol', *Journal of American Folklore* 78, no. 309 (1965): 204-28; Henry D. Shapiro, *Appalachia On Our Mind: The Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness, 1870-1920* (Chapel Hill: University North Carolina Press, 1986).

[11] For definitions and discussions of the relative 'southerness' of roots music in this period, see Benjamin Filene, *Romancing The Folk: Public Memory & American Roots Music* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 4; Brian Ward and Patrick Huber, *A&R Pioneers: Architects of American Roots Music on Record* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press and Country Music Foundation Press, 2018), 2-8; Bill C. Malone, *Sing Me Back Home: Southern Roots and Country Music* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2017); Karl Hagstrom Miller, *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2010); Robert Santelli, Holly George-Warren, and Jim Brown, eds., *American Roots Music* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002); Nolan Porterfield, ed., *Exploring Roots Music: Twenty Years of the JEMF Quarterly* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2004), 4.

coastal Gullah-dialect songs, and was the bedrock of the sleeker, commercialised sounds coming from records and radio. However, most 'folk' musicians typically were amateurs or semi-professionals who only practiced in local settings and vernacular styles, at least until folklorists began to document and record them. A range of power dynamics enabled folklorists to decide what was 'folk' and what was not, but it often rested on a lack of 'professionalism' and ideas of 'authenticity'.[12]

Although roots music is a slippery term to define, it is a useful concept for this project. True, old-time, race music, and folk music could be as different from each other as they were to classical music or popular Tin Pan Alley tunes. Conversely, if roots music encompassed these distinct, often 'segregated sounds', musicians frequently straddled the borders between them.[13] Despite these complexities, what united these roots musics, aside from their strong associations to the South, is the shared perception of them as the 'pure' sources from which other kinds of music drew.[14] In this context, the aged were natural roots musicians as they occupied nodes on the deepest, most simon-pure 'stems' of the larger 'root architecture'. As this dissertation shows, another commonality among these genres was that they all featured, to varying degrees and for a variety of reasons, aged musicians or old age imaginaries.

This dissertation unearths new sources and synthesises old and recent research into old age, southern modernity, and roots music to better understand why and how the likes of

[12] A short selection of works on early twentieth century folk music includes Benjamin Filene, *Romancing The Folk: Public Memory & American Roots Music* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 9-75; Jane S. Becker, *Selling Tradition: Appalachia and the Construction of an American Folk, 1930-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Regina Bendix, *In Search of Authenticity: The Formation of Folklore Studies* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997); Ronald D. Cohen, *Depression Folk: Grassroots Music and Left-Wing Politics in 1930s America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016); Robert Cantwell, *When We Were Good: The Folk Revival* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996); David E. Whisnant, *All That Is Native & Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region*, 25th Anniversary Edition (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).
[13] Miller, *Segregating Sound*, 1-11.
[14] The idea that notions of 'purity' connect different kinds of roots music is discussed in Filene, *Romancing The Folk*, 4.

the Mississippi Mud Mashers and their grandma-themed song, Uncle Dave Macon, Uncle Henry Warren, Wallace Quarterman, and the old fiddlers of Falls County, amongst numerous others historical actors, became such a features of roots music in the first half of the twentieth century. At the same time, however, the argument here is that these artists and those around them did not merely echo these wider historical contexts, but rather, by helping craft, disseminate, or challenge certain narratives about old age, modernity, and roots music, were protagonistic and antagonistic forces in the development of these new social paradigms.

The Aged South

Although principally rooted in primary and secondary research into southern roots music, this dissertation also engages with a flourishing multi-disciplinary literature on age and ageing. Debate has raged in age studies over the 'borders' between different life stages. Indeed, a key principle of the relatively 'young' scholarly discipline has been to denaturalise and deconstruct age identities in different political, social, and historical contexts. Childhood, adolescence, adulthood, middle-age, and old age are simultaneously chronologically determined, personally felt, and socially constructed through cultural norms, legal frameworks, and economic and bureaucratic institutions.[15] While this dissertation occasionally attends to other life stages - as well as *ageing*, the transitional process of getting *older* - it nevertheless focuses more on the condition and identity of *old age*. In this period, this age demographic was commonly identified as anyone over-50, but increasingly as over-65 years old once Social Security came into being. Older persons were given a range of names over the twentieth century, including the aged, the elderly, elders, the superannuated,

[15] The most significant 'deconstructionist' approaches to old age and ageing come from feminist scholarship: Simone de Beauvoir, *The Coming of Age*, trans. Patrick O'Brian (New York: Norton, 1996); Margaret Gullette, *Aged By Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Kathleen Woodward, ed., *Figuring Age: Women, Bodies, Generations* (Bloomington, Ind: Indiana University Press, 1999).

'old-timers', 'old folks', and, more recently, senior citizens, most of which are used relatively interchangeably in this dissertation in order to reflect the language and thinking of the period. However, this dissertation is sensitive to more recent work on old age that nuances this potentially lengthy period of life. Clearly, much distinguishes a sexagenarian from a centenarian. In this respect, recent conceptions of a 'third' and 'fourth age', and older ideas of a 'green old age', are useful in making theses distinctions when necessary. Yet it is significant that many contemporaries, including older performers themselves, did not openly make such distinctions.[16] Rather, this dissertation shows that in the realm of roots music, many individuals and groups constructed 'old age' as a recognisable stage of life with its own sets of expectations and tropes.

Scholars have long expressed interest in the meanings of old age and ageing, but it took until the 1970s for more schematic studies to be undertaken in the history of old age in the US. The 'age turn' in historical research has been enrichened by the formation of a loose federation of multi- and interdisciplinary age studies scholars with diverse academic backgrounds ranging from literature, media, cultural studies, social sciences, health sciences, and anthropology. From these disciplines, many of the pioneering age historians borrowed what is termed the 'modernisation model' of old age. Broadly speaking, this model posits that 'premodern' or agrarian societies venerated their proportionally smaller aged populations, while 'modern', urban and industrialised societies have problematised and denigrated old age as their elderly population has increased in size.[17] The exact timing and

[16] Paul Higgs and Chris Gilleard, *Rethinking Old Age: Theorising the Fourth Age* (London: Macmillan International Higher Education, 2015).
[17] Gerontologists, sociologists and anthropologists were the first to embrace modernisation theory: Leo W. Simmons, *The Role of the Aged in Primitive Society* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1945). Ernest Watson Burgess, *Aging in Western Societies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960); Irving Rosow, *Socialization to Old Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974); D. Cowgill and Lowell D. Holmes, *Aging and Modernization* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1972); Richard C. Crandall, *Gerontology: A Behavioural Science Approach* (Boston: Addison-Wesley, 1980); Lowell D. Holmes, 'Trends in Anthropological Gerontology: From Simmons to the Seventies', *International Journal of Aging and Development*, no. 7 (1976): 211-20; Jerome Kaplan and G. J Aldridge, eds., *Social Welfare of the Aging* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962).

impetus for this paradigm shift in age relations remains hotly debated, but attention has largely been confined to the political, economic, spiritual, and medical upheavals of the 'long nineteenth century'.[18]

By contrast, Carole Haber and Brian Gatton have flipped the modernisation model on its head by arguing that modernity entailed improvements in healthcare and social welfare that raised life expectancy and the quality of later life.[19] Haber and Gratton attest that despite, or, ironically, *because* of these general improvements, the early twentieth century saw an increase in negative narratives about old age as an unwelcome stage of life, particularly as age grading became a more medicalised and bureaucratised process. From this perspective, the modernising US in the early twentieth century experienced what gerontologist Douglas E. Crews calls a 'cultural lag', in which perspectives about old age did not correlate with improving social conditions.[20]

Other scholars, such as Pat Thane, reject fundamentally a gerontophobic/gerontophilic approach to old age history, calling instead for a recognition of the 'plurality of the experience and perception of old age' over time and place.[21] Answering Thane's call, more recent research abandons attempts to fit their findings into a teleological framework. This new brand of age studies is more occupied pinpointing the nexus where age meets more prominent power structures, such as the familiar societal pillars of class, race,

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[18] David Hackett Fischer, for example, claims that the revolutionary principles of the Early Republic changed age relations as they had in Revolutionary France: David Hackett Fischer, *Growing Old in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978). Thomas Cole, meanwhile, turned to religious changes during the Second Great Awakening and the influence of European ideas: Thomas R. Cole, *The Journey of Life: A Cultural History of Aging in America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992). Early on in his career, W. Andrew Achenbaum viewed the Civil War as an important watershed moment: W. Andrew Achenbaum, *Old Age in the New Land: The American Experience since 1790* (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 86-100.

[19] Achenbaum, despite ultimately using a modernisation model, warned against 'facile generalizations' of historical or national attitudes to old age: Achenbaum, *Old Age in the New Land*, 167.

[20] Douglas E. Crews, 'Cultural Lags in Social Perceptions of the Aged', *Generations*, Spring/Summer 1993, 29-33.

[21] Pat Thane, 'Social Histories of Old Age and Aging' *Journal of Social History* 37, No.1 (2003) 93-111

and gender.[22] This dissertation leans more towards Haber and Gratton's interventions in the modernisation debate but does not pretend to resolve these larger issues. Rather, this study contends that the lens of age is most useful in forming new vistas, such as the history of the South and the roots music that flourished there.

Ultimately, Haber and Gratton's 1993 description of old age historiography as 'an unassembled jigsaw puzzle' could still be applied today.[23] Aside from the modernity debate, a further issue in assembling this puzzle is that scholars often wear nationalistic and macro-level blinkers, meaning they do not account for regional differences.[24] For this reason, old age in the southern context has not received its due attention. Aside from a few exceptions, the field of southern studies, including the supposedly more innovative, interdisciplinary, and critical 'new southern studies', has failed to adequately re-evaluate southern history or discourses of 'southerness' through the prism of age.[25] Equally, when the South appears in

[22] Some exemplary example of this new wave of age research include Corinne T. Field and Nicholas L. Syrett, eds., *Age in America: The Colonial Era to the Present* (New York: New York University Press, 2015); Sari Edelstein, *Adulthood and Other Fictions: American Literature and the Unmaking of Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).
[23] Carole Haber and Brian Gratton, *Old Age and the Search for Security: An American Social History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), xi.
[24] Some studies have intentionally focused on regional and local case studies, particularly on New England: Paula A. Scott, *Growing Old in the Early Republic: Spiritual, Social, and Economic Issues, 1790-1830* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1997); Edelstein, 'Over the Hill and Out of Sight: Locating Old Age in Regionalism', in *Adulthood and Other Fictions*, 93-119. In the southern context, Haber and Gratton have focused specifically on Charleston, South Carolina: Carole Haber and Brian Gratton, 'Old Age, Public Welfare and Race: The Case of Charleston, South Carolina 1800-1949', *Journal of Social History* 21, no. 2 (1987): 263-79. The Gerontological Society of America's journal was first introduced as a monograph which would treat 'the issue of aging and the humanistic and artistic elements in national and regional cultures': Dana Bradley and Anne M. Wyatt-Brown, 'Introduction', *Journal of Aging, Humanities, and the Arts* 1, no. 1-2 (8 June 2007): 1. Despite their intentions, however, most critical gerontologists have been more influenced by global or postcolonial turns in the discipline than local or regional ones: Maria Carinnes P. Alejandria-Gonzalez, Subharati Ghosh, and Nicolas Sacco, eds., *Aging in the Global South: Challenges and Opportunities* (Lexington, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2018); Silke van Dyk, 'The Othering of Old Age: Insights from Postcolonial Studies', *Journal of Aging Studies* 39 (December 2016): 109-20.
[25] The category of age, for example, diadd not feature at all in a 2014 forum from several leading scholars on new directions in southern studies: Brian Ward, 'Forum: What's New in Southern Studies - And Why Should We Care?'. *Journal of American Studies* 48, no. 3 (01 August 2014): 691-733. Generational concerns, nevertheless, are a key feature of what distinguishes the New Southern Studies from the 'old'. Jon Smith, a leading proponent of

national histories of old age, usually it is mentioned only in passing as an anomaly to the national narrative.[26] That the only substantial history of old age in the South to date remains Marcus Harvey's 2001 doctoral dissertation is an indictment on both the fields of southern studies and age studies. The present work aims to remedy this void in the literature by asking, as Harvey did nearly two decades ago, whether 'the differences between the two sections [could] be expected to have had some effect on cultural attitudes towards the elderly?'[27]

It is surprising that age dynamics in the South remains a relatively untrampled field considering the vigorous scholarly debates surrounding the South's complex relationship with modernity. Historically, the US has been characterised as an 'unevenly developed' nation whose southern states 'modernised' later compared to the rest of the country. A simple argument can be made therefore that this 'distal modernity' generated a distinct, to some degree 'premodern' taxonomy of age in the region.[28] Not for nothing have perspectives of the South as a culturally, socially and economically 'backwards' section regularly been expressed by anthropomorphised depictions of the region as iconic aged characters. In the midst of the Civil War, for example, one critical southern writer claimed that 'Yes, Cotton is King, but I oftentimes fear the king he resembles is possibly King Lear'.[29] Equally,

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the New Southern Studies, for example, frames some of the tensions between American and 'new' and 'old' southern studies as generational: Jon Smith, *Finding Purple America: The South and the Future of American Cultural Studies* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2013), 1-3.

[26] Two prominent examples of this tendency include Thomas R. Cole, *The Journey of Life: A Cultural History of Aging in America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), xxx; David Hackett Fischer, *Growing Old in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 66-68.

[27] This current study most notably differs to Harvey's dissertation in its focuses on the twentieth rather than nineteenth century: Marcus G. Harvey, 'The Cultural Significance of Old Age in the American South, 1830-1900' (PhD dissertation, University of Florida, 2001).

[28] For ideas about the 'uneven development' of modernity, see Neil Smith, *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space*, Third Edition (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008). Marcus G. Harvey explicitly make this argument in his doctoral dissertation: 'the modernization framework upon which so much of the earlier [research on old age history] was based seems to invite, if not demand, a specific consideration of attitudes towards the aged based on Southern sources': Harvey, 'The Cultural Significance of Old Age in the American South, 1830-1900', 15.

[29] 'King Cotton', *Southern Literary Messenger*, 35, April 1863, 256.

Appalachia has commonly been referred to as an ageing Rip Van Wrinkle, awakening from its 'slumber' to a transformed world.[30] In a trite but telling analysis of the 'historical dimension' of southern literature, the historian C. Vann Woodward compares southern writers like William Faulkner to the more present-minded American modernists like Ernest Hemmingway whose characters 'appear to live completely in the present. To emphasize their historical rootlessness they are invariably pictured as expatriates, as wanderers, as soldiers or adventurers … A Hemingway hero with a grandfather is inconceivable.'[31] Although some of these allusions to age that pepper nineteenth and twentieth century 'southscapes' cannot be taken too seriously, or, as entirely unique to the southern context or the qualities of old age, they at least suggest that the practice of yoking old age tropes to an idea of an archaic South has been relatively common since the immediate postbellum era.[32]

Still, by simplistically representing the region as an 'old', developmentally 'backwards' section, deprived of the 'civilisation' enjoyed by 'enlightened' northerners, this analysis falls into the intellectual trap of 'southern exceptionalism'. Enough southern studies scholars have gone grey with anxiety over what constitutes 'the South' and 'southerness' to warrant only a cursory discussion here. If there were important differences between the South and other regions, they were often, in Matthew D. Lassiter and Joseph Crespino's assessment, 'differences of degree' rather than 'differences of kind'.[33] As James Cobb,

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[30] For a selection of age-based depictions of Appalachia, see Anthony Harkins, *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 43.
[31] C. Vann Woodward, 'The Historical Dimension', in *The Burden of Southern History*, Third Edition (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), 31. In a similar vein is Allen Tate's characterisation of the 'backwards glance', or what he defines the 'peculiar historical consciousness of the Southern writer'. For a detailed analysis of Tate's conception of the 'backwards glance', see Joseph R. Millichap, *A Backward Glance: The Southern Renascence, the Autobiographical Epic, and the Classical Legacy* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 2. It curious that Woodward made this comparison considering in 1952 Hemingway published *Old Man and the Sea*, a novel that focuses on age and death: Dedria Bryfonski, ed., *Death in Ernest Hemingway's The Old Man and the Sea* (Farmington Hill, Michigan: Greenhaven Publishing, 2014).
[32] For the concept of 'southscapes', see Thadious M. Davis, *Southscapes: Geographies of Race, Region, and Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 2.
[33] Matthew D. Lassiter and Joseph Crespino, 'Introduction: The End of Southern History', in Matthew D. Lassiter and Joseph Crespino, eds., *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism* (New

advises, southernists should be wary of defining 'southern peculiarities solely in relation to "the North"'.[34] Just as recent scholars have deconstructed myths about the South as a uniquely 'premodern' place, economically, culturally, and politically, it stands to reason that southern attitudes about ageing likewise were not entirely 'exceptional'.[35] This dissertation does not pretend to resolve the academic wrangling over the thorny question of 'southern exceptionality'. Instead, it recognises and embraces the fact that some of the experiences and representations of old age in the South were similar to, influenced by, and influential on those found outside the region.

For this study, the states of the Confederacy are the bedrock of the territory under inspection. Several border states with strong southern connections, such as Kentucky, Missouri, and West Virginia, are also considered. The sheer size of this regional construction inevitably leads to some imbalanced focus here, with a tendency to generalise and potentially overlook peculiar age contexts at state, county, and more local levels. Still, this dissertation is sensitive to recent revisionist literature on southern history that considers how urban, national and transnational influences reconceptualise ideas of 'southerness' and

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York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 12. Natalie Ring argues that this problematising of the South served to legitimatise the 'importance of modernization and the advance of civilization': Natalie Ring, *The Problem South: Region, Empire, and the New Liberal State, 1880-1930* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012), 6.

[34] James C. Cobb, *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 2.

[35] For studies that challenge ideas of 'southern exceptionalism', see L. Diane Barnes, Brian Schoen, and Frank Towers, eds., *The Old South's Modern Worlds: Slavery, Region, and Nation in the Age of Progress* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); William A. Link, *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism, 1880-1930*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Leigh Anne Duck, *The Nation's Region: Southern Modernism, Segregation, and U.S. Nationalism* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009); James Peacock, *Grounded Globalism: How the U.S. South Embraces the World* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007). C. Vann. Woodward, however, was one of the first to call for this wider contextualisation of the southern experience: C. Vann Woodward, 'The Irony of Southern History', in *The Burden of Southern History*, Third Edition (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), 187-212.

help remap the South's borders.[36] Ultimately, this dissertation recognises and embraces a messier reality in which the literal and symbolic boundaries of the South were permeable and moveable, but in which many contemporaries, from producers and promoters, to musicians and fans, *believed* in an identifiably 'southern' region. Importantly, this study suggests that age itself could play a role in (de)constructing some of those boundaries.

These intellectual caveats aside, this dissertation takes an unabashedly *regional* approach to the history of old age. Therefore, it is grounded in a range of structural factors that historically have distinguished the South in one way or another. A central argument of this dissertation is that it was the relatively swift and accelerative nature of modernisation in the South that placed a question mark over southern identity. Consequentially, this intensified what old age meant in relation to the region. As C. Vann Woodward argues, it was the 'speed and concentration' of modernisation in the South that levelled 'many of the old monuments of regional distinctiveness'. From various attempts to build a 'New South' near the turn of the century, to what Woodward calls the 'Bulldozer Revolution' of the mid-twentieth century, the South has been pulled, occasionally enthusiastically, but most often kicking and screaming, into the modern world at a particularly abrasive pace.[37] This dissertation shows that representations of the aged South in roots music were manifestations of wider contemporary sentiments then percolating in society about those shifting times.

For southerners in the early twentieth century, such a transition was a messy, uneven, and often unconscious process. The actual 'newness' of the South in this period is as thoroughly contested in recent scholarship as it was at the time. This study works on the

[36] The scholarship on southern border crossing is vast, and several texts already mentioned cover some of these themes. A useful recent example of such scholarship includes Mary Weaks-Baxter, *Leaving the South: Border Crossing Narratives and the Remaking of Southern Identity* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2018).

[37] While the 'Bulldozer Revolution' was a concept more pertinent to the 1940s and 1950s, the period in which Woodward was writing, he recognised that 'premonitions of the present revolution appeared during the industrial boom that followed the First World War': C. Vann Woodward, 'The Search for Southern Identity', in *The Burden of Southern History*, Third Edition (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), 4-8.

basis that many contemporaries believed, often with good reason, that the South was undergoing a momentous social, cultural, and economic transformation, even if their realities were more complex. This widely shared, if occasionally contradictory worldview constituted what Raymond Williams famously described as a 'structure of feeling', particularly a set of anxieties about change that made depictions of the 'aged South' in roots music a more feasible, relatable phenomenon.[38]

This fascination with old age was one mode of a wider 'antimodernist' movement prominent in US society since the late nineteenth century. T. J. Lears' description of antimodernism, in its simplest configuration, as 'the recoil from an "overcivilized" modern existence to more intense forms of physical or spiritual experience', is therefore a particularly useful grounding for this dissertation.[39] Older southerners appealed to these antimodernist sentiments, in the South and beyond, because they were artefacts of the 'pre-modern' age. Their experiences and backgrounds qualified them as 'authentic' individuals in an increasingly 'artificial' world. Although much of the cast of antimodernists that Lears focuses on were from a north-eastern, intellectual milieu, this dissertation shows that such sentiments extended to southerners and Americans who happily consumed southern culture. An equally important lesson from Lears is that antimodernism was a constituent element of modernisation; or, as Susan Stanford Friedman puts it in simple terms: 'Tradition comes into being only as it is rebelled against.'[40] As such, aged southerners were not merely reactionary figures: it was often through the apparatuses and energies of modernity, not least

[38] Williams developed his ideas about 'structures of feeling' over his entire career, but particularly in Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2001), 66-68.
[39] Lears originally dated the antimodern movement to the turn of the century, but revamped his definition of antimodernism in later editions to suggest the ways it has thrived throughout the twentieth century: T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1994), x-xx.
[40] Susan Stanford Friedman, *Planetary Modernisms: Provocations on Modernity Across Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 45. Other works which have influenced the thinking here about modernity and the South, aside those already mentioned, include: Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013); Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013).

technological and economic developments, that they became important players in roots music.

While these broad-brush strokes fill out the background of much of this dissertation, it is worth considering how some of the South's own demographic, economic, medical, and social environments sculpted age realities and imaginaries below the Mason-Dixon line. Generally speaking, the South was a marginally 'young' region: in 1900, approximately 3.1 percent of the South were aged 65 and older, just one percent lower than the national average. Despite these differences, the southern population was ageing at a similar rate to national figures: by 1950, 6.9. percent of all southerners were over 65 years old.[41] The demographics of Dixie have also been shaped by its particularly 'mobile' population. The southern population was hollowed out during the Great Migration, which saw mostly young and middle-aged adults move in their hundreds of thousands from rural regions to small towns, cities, and out of the South.[42] In its famous *Report on Economic Conditions of the*

[41] The Bureau of the Census for 1900 and 1950 interpreted 'the South' as the following states: West Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas. These figures were broadly similar in different states. In 1940, for example, most of the above states were within a two percent margin of this regional average, with the only notable outlier being Texas with 13.2 percent of its population over-65 years old: Bureau of the Census, 'Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970, Part 1', 21-23. The relatively 'younger' age of the South is usually explained by a historically lower life expectancy of southerners: Andrew Fenelon, 'Geographic Divergence in Mortality in the United States', *Population and Development Review* 39, no. 4 (1 December 2013): 611-34. Age statistics about southerners during this period are particularly unreliable due to the relative underegistration of births in southern states. In Virginia in 1897, for example, the Legislature cut health board funding so much that no births were registered that year: Shane Landrum, 'From Family Bibles to Birth Certificates: Young People, Proof of Age, and American Political Cultures, 1820-1915', in *Age in America: The Colonial Era to the Present*, ed. Corinne T. Field and Nicholas L. Syrett (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 131-32.

[42] There is considerable scholarly debate about the causes, directional flows, impacts, and timings of the First and Second Great Migrations among white and African American rural southerners. An overview of some key works includes James N. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill: University North Carolina Press, 2005); Erin Royston Battat, *Ain't Got No Home: America's Great Migrations and the Making of an Interracial Left* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Dernoral Davis, 'Toward a Socio-Historical and Demographic Portrait of Twentieth-Century African-Americans', in *Black Exodus: The Great Migration from the American South*, ed. Alferdteen Harrison (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), 1-19.

South in 1938, the National Emergency Council warned President Franklin D. Roosevelt that one of the many 'problems' facing the South was that it was a 'land of the very old and the very young.' During the 1920s, the South lost about half of its population aged 15 to 35 years.[43] This demographic make-up was an important context for how southern ideas evolved about old age: while there were fewer southerners in extreme old age, it may have felt like there were more, merely because there was more contact across a wider generational gap. This age dynamic helps explain a running motif of this dissertation: elderly southerners were valued primarily for their role in transmitting vernacular, oral, or 'traditional' knowledge and values to younger generations in an era in which many feared the young were increasingly vulnerable to the 'lure' of alternative sources of values, such as city life and mass popular culture.[44]

The South was also a largely agrarian region within an increasingly urban nation. In 1920, for the first time more Americans were living in cities than rural settings, a trend which only accelerated over the subsequent decades. By 1950, the national urban population had doubled, and, for the first time since records began, the rural population was beginning to shrink rather than expand.[45] By contrast, all but 4.6 million of the over 28 million native-born persons in the Southeast alone in 1930 lived in rural districts. At the same time, the growth of sprawling 'New South' cities such as Atlanta, Charlotte, Nashville, and Houston, alongside hundreds of middling-sized industrial and market towns, wedged a sense of

[43] National Emergency Council, *Report on Economic Conditions of the South* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1938), 17-18, 26.
[44] For studies on anxieties about youth culture in the early twentieth century US, see Charles R. Acland, 'Fresh Contacts: Global Culture and the Concept of Generation', in *American Youth Cultures*, ed. Neil Campbell (New York: Routledge, 2004), 31-52; Joe Alan Austin and Michael Willard, eds., *Generations of Youth: Youth Cultures and History in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: New York University Press, 1998); Jon Savage, *Teenage: The Creation of Youth, 1875-1945* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2008); Laura B. Edge, *From Jazz Babies to Generation Next: The History of the American Teenager* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Twenty-First Century Books, 2011); Grace Palladino, *Teenagers: An American History* (New York: Basic Books, 1996).
[45] 'Series A 57-72. Population in Urban and Rural Territory, by Size of Place: 1790 to 1970', in Bureau of the Census, 'Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970, Part 1' (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975), 10.

modern urban life into the South. Those within and at the fringes of these 'cosmopolitan' oases felt mixtures of excitement and ambiguity about what was gained and lost by urban life. This tussle between the city and the country, as Raymond Williams and numerous thinkers before him argued, is one of the most fundamental tensions of modernity, and as such resurfaces repeatedly throughout this dissertation.[46] For many contemporaries, older southerners embodied rural 'old-fashioned' ways of the country at a time when the young were swinging to the exhilarating, if occasionally frightening modern rhythms and lifestyles of the city. For sure, many southerners lived in liminal spaces where the trappings of urban and rural life coexisted. Roots musicians, the wider culture industry, and audiences frequently appreciated and played with these liminalities. However, this dissertation shows that representations of old age often served to reinforce simplistic urban/rural dichotomies by adding a temporal edge. The peculiar deployment of age-related performance practices and repertoires within roots music helped to widen a spatial-generational gap between 'old country people' and 'young city people'.

The South was also characterised by the intertwining issues of poverty, sickness, and inequality. As Woodward surmises, 'generations of scarcity and want constitute one of the distinctive historical experiences of the Southern people'.[47] A combination of this economic situation and political forces mean there were only tiny provisions for healthcare in southern

[46] Williams was of course writing in reference to English countryside, but his ideas are certainly applicable in the southern context: Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (Oxford University Press, 1975), 1-6. David A. Davis employs the notion of distal modernity/modernism to understand the South's gradual response to new economic, social and political changes, including urbanisation, after the First World War: David A. Davis, *World War I and Southern Modernism* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2017). A selection of work on the urban South and modernity includes Leigh Anne Duck, *The Nation's Region: Southern Modernism, Segregation, and U.S. Nationalism* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009); Wanda Rushing, *Memphis and the Paradox of Place Globalization in the American South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Louis M. Kyriakoudes, *The Social Origins of the Urban South: Race, Gender, and Migration in Nashville and Middle Tennessee, 1890-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Mary Ellen Pethel, *Athens of the New South: College Life and the Making of Modern Nashville* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2017).
[47] C. Vann Woodward, 'The Search for Southern Identity', in *The Burden of Southern History*, Third Edition (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), 17.

states.[48] The same 1938 report that inspired President Roosevelt to label the South 'the nation's number one economic problem', also claimed that the greater prevalence of syphilis, malaria, tuberculosis, pneumonia, and pellagra in the region was a moral stain on the nation's progressive ideals. 'The low-income belt of the South,' the report read, 'is a belt of sickness, misery and unnecessary death.'[49] In more recent years, health scientists and gerontologists have recognised how these economic and medical contexts in the South have caused acute issues for its aged population.[50]

Cutting across these medical and economic contexts is the distinct, if not entirely unique, history of old age welfare in the South. In general, early efforts towards old age relief in southern states were significantly smaller, voluntary, and more decentralised than elsewhere. Jill Quadagno goes as far to argue that the South's resistance to old age pensions contributed to the relatively 'delayed' trajectory of progressive social welfare in the US compared to European nation states. Since Reconstruction, Quadagno attests, southern Democrats and a planter class feared that any federally orchestrated form of social security would undermine their paternalistic control of the southern tenant labour system, which required the participation of the entire family, including the elderly. By the onset of the

[48] For associations between the South and disease, see Todd L. Savitt and James Harvey Young, eds., *Disease and Distinctiveness in the American South* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991).
[49] National Emergency Council, *Report on Economic Conditions of the South*, 29-32. For the particularly damaging pellagra epidemic in the US South, see Karen Clay, Ethan Schmick, and Werner Troesken, 'The Rise and Fall of Pellagra in the American South', *Journal of Economic History* 79, no. 1 (2019): 32-62.
[50] Since 1965, for example, a cluster of southern states has become known as the 'Stroke Belt' because high stroke mortality rates historically have been 20 and 50 percent higher than the national average: N. O. Borhani, 'Changes and Geographic Distribution of Mortality From Cerebrovascular Disease', *American Journal of Public Health and the Nation's Health* 55 (May 1965): 673-81; James B. Wetmore et al., 'Stroke and the "Stroke Belt" in Dialysis: Contribution of Patient Characteristics to Ischemic Stroke Rate and Its Geographic Variation', *Journal of the American Society of Nephrology* 24, no. 12 (1 December 2013): 2053-61. Other social factors such as race and class also affect the survival chances of older southerners. A more recent example of this is the shocking statistic that 70 percent of motralities during Hurricane Katrina were those in their seventies or older: Robert R. N. Ross and Deanne E. B. Ross, *Walking to New Orleans: Ethics and the Concept of Participatory Design in Post-Disaster Reconstruction* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2008), 191.

Great Depression, Quadagno's argues, 'old age relief in the South was almost non-existent, and what public welfare that did exist was entirely under local control'.[51] Indeed, primarily due to the dominance of political patronage, few Townsend Plan clubs existed in the South.[52] However, much scholarly debate remains about the relationship between southerners and New Deal efforts towards Social Security. The focus, understandably, has been on the causes and effects of initial measures which denied domestic and agricultural workers the right to a state pension. Such policies, it is argued, disproportionally excluded southerners, and, in particular, women, African Americans and other minorities.[53] Yet southerners were not entirely disposed against old age welfare. A central plank of Louisiana Governor and then Senator Huey Long's controversial 'Share the Wealth' campaign in early 1930s was a universal pension scheme. As Long himself regularly boasted, it was a southerner (himself), who was the first Senator to place an old age pension bill before Congress.[54] Such exceptions aside, southerners, by and large, did not demand, or have the opportunity to benefit from, old age welfare. While it is beyond the remit of this dissertation to linger long over the political history of southern old age welfare provisions, it is important to acknowledge that the unrolling of Old Age Insurance and Old Age Assistance in the South

[51] Jill Quadagno, The Transformation of Old Age Security: Class and Politics in the American Welfare State (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 131.
[52] As Edwin Amenta argues, the generally small numbers of Townsend clubs in the South was not necessarily due to race issues, as Townsend clubs were not usually expected to be integrated, although it was the Black Belt southern states who had the fewest number of clubs. In Amenta's assessment, the issue was more the lack of 'democratic political systems and non-patronage party systems'. The strongest efforts to bring the movement to the South were found in Texas and Florida: Amenta, *When Movements Matter*, 122.
[53] For two differing perspectives on the racial implications of the Social Security Act, see Mary Poole, *The Segregated Origins of Social Security: African Americans and the Welfare State* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Larry DeWitt, 'The Decision to Exclude Agricultural and Domestic Workers from the 1935 Social Security Act', *Social Security Bulletin* 70, no. 4 (2010).
[54] Long's relationship with the pension issue was anything but straightforward, particularly how it intersected with his typically contradictory racial politics. On the one hand, he criticised the federal programme of Old Age Assistance for its exclusion of blacks. On the other hand, Long used race-baiting tactics during the 1932 gubernatorial campaign between his handpicked candidate O. K. Allen and his opponent Dudley J. LeBlanc, who also advocated for a pension. Long warned that under LeBlanc's scheme, 'some 60,000 Negroes would get $30 per month': Anthony J. Badger, *New Deal / New South: An Anthony J. Badger Reader* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2007), 1-30.

was uneven and messy, but the debates surrounding what in the South was called 'rocking chair money' were as volatile and varied there as they were in the North.[55] In this context, this dissertation adds roots music to C. Vann Woodward's long list of the ironies that have characterised southern history: southerners valorised the aged but generally refused to provide sufficient state aid to support their basic needs.[56]

A similar theme of equivocation also characterises southern attitudes to a large and renowned contingent of its aged population in the early twentieth century: Confederate veterans. As advocates and icons, aged veterans were key to the evolution of the 'Confederate tradition' which promoted a 'Lost Cause' ideology based on a set of white supremacist beliefs about slavery and the antebellum South, Confederate perspectives on the Civil War, and ideas about southern values. A network of reunions, veterans' and veteran-orientated organisations, publications, and several public figures inculcated this almost religious creed into several tiers of southern life.[57] The longevity of aged veterans became

[55] In the late 1940s, the University of North Carolina's Institute for Research in Social Science conducted surveys of social attitudes in counties in North Carolina, South Carolina and Alabama, including local perspectives on old age In the records for the project, file cards entitled 'Old Age' provide small but powerful insights into the perceptions of age amongst rural southerners, including the naming of savings for later life as 'rocking chair money': 'Old Age', File 1017, File Box 1, Box 1, Field Studies in the Modern Culture of the South Records, North Carolina Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

[56] Woodward, 'The Irony of Southern History', 187-212.

[57] Gaines M. Foster prefers to use the term 'Confederate tradition', rather than either 'myth' or 'civic religion', as other authors have done, to avoid the 'scholarly baggage' of such terms, and discuss what he describes as a 'cultural belief over time': Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South, 1865-1913* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 8. A selection of significant studies of the 'Lost Cause' includes Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1983); Gary W. Gallagher, Myra MacPherson, and Alan T. Nolan, eds., *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History* (Indiana University Press, 2000); Anne Elizabeth Marshall, *Creating a Confederate Kentucky: The Lost Cause and Civil War Memory in a Border State* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Caroline E. Janney, *Burying The Dead But Not the Past: Ladies' Memorial Associations and the Lost Cause* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Robert J. Cook, *Civil War Memories: Contesting the Past in the United States Since 1865* (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017); John A. Simpson, *Edith D. Pope and Her Nashville Friends: Guardians of the Lost Cause in the Confederate Veteran* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003); Karen L. Cox, *Dixie's Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003).

symbolic of the perseverance of the Confederate spirit; at the same time, their age and its associated physical vulnerabilities also symbolised the 'decaying' of Old South values in the modern world.[58] This dissertation considers how roots music was an equally important domain in which Lost Cause ideologues wheeled out, sometimes literally, elderly veterans, both as musicians and audiences, in order to strengthen the Confederate tradition.

Despite this reverence for aged Confederate veterans, many ex-servicemen were reliant upon charitable support and scraps of piecemeal state aid to get through any hardships of old age.[59] By comparison, state and federal pensions were provided for all aged ex-servicemen of the Union Army, and, by 1907, old age itself was regarded as a sufficient cause for relief as disability or penury. Despite the greater proportion of the southern population that actually served in the war, less than 20 percent of Confederate veterans actually received veteran benefits in 1905, while 80 percent of Union veterans did.[60] Where they existed, Confederate pensions had more administrative barriers, were harder to access, and were less financially generous. Theda Skocpol argues that 'Even with lower standards of living in the south taken into account, the Confederate pensions were truly penurious.'[61] R.

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[58] This interpretation of the significances of aged veterans builds on that in David S. Cecelski, 'Oldest Living Confederate Chaplain Tells All?: Or, James B. Avirett and the Rise and Fall of the Rich Lands', *Southern Cultures* 3, no. 4 (4 January 2012): 11. The image of an ageing 'Johnny Reb' persisted long after the deaths of the last Confederate veterans. As Harry Watson demonstrates, the image rearose in an iconic cartoon during the heated centennial of the Civil War in the 1960s, amidst the backdrop of an increasingly prominent Civil Rights Movement, in which 'a doddering Union veteran clutches the Stars and Stripes [who] wearily advises, "Forget it" … [and] an equally old but defiant Confederate brandishes his own side's Battle Flag and snarls back, "Fergit, hell!"': Harry L. Watson, 'Front Porch', *Southern Cultures* 19, no. 3 (15 August 2013): 2.

[59] As most welfare scholars agree, the history of pensions in the US was intimately tied up with the development of Civil War pensions. For a concise summary of Confederate pensions and a closer examination of their history in Georgia, see Joanna Short, 'Confederate Veteran Pensions, Occupation, and Men's Retirement in the New South', *Social Science History* 30, no. 1 (2006): 75-101. In 1901, all of the old states of the Confederacy received less pensions combined than the state of Ohio, a fact Theda Skocpol suggests indicates how Unionist veteran pensions essentially 'exploited the Civil War's losers to care for its winners': Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), 147.

[60] Skocpol, 139.

[61] Skocpol, 140.

B. Rosenburg's robust study of Confederate veteran homes reveals a similar disjuncture between reverential southern rhetoric about the old ex-servicemen as 'living monuments' to the Confederacy, and the lack of appropriate care provided for institutionalised veterans.[62]

Another contingent of the aged southern population that historically has received considerable popular and scholarly attention are elderly (ex-)enslaved people. Age was a metric in the evaluation of the worth of slaves, with devastating consequences for older slaves. Ironically, pro-slavery discourses frequently upheld examples of very aged slaves as 'proof' of the benevolence of slave-owners and the institution of slavery. As Sari Edelstein argues, 'age operates in conjunction with discourses of power to naturalize other hierarchies', thereby making concepts such as 'maturity' become a 'core element of class, gender, and racial privilege'.[63] In the early twentieth century, many Lost Cause ideologues, including Confederate veterans' organisations, induced, and more often concocted, testimonies from supposedly contented 'old darkies' who recalled nostalgically their benign masters and the Old South. Conversely, however, one of the most famous depictions of an aged slave, Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom, initially served an abolitionist agenda, even if this imagery was ultimately co-opted for more regressive racial politics in later years.[64]

New approaches to southern history from the medical humanities help understand why aged veterans and (ex-)slaves, amongst other elderly southerners, held potent meanings in

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[62] For studies on Confederate veterans, see R. B. Rosenburg, *Living Monuments: Confederate Soldiers' Homes in the New South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 1-20; Rusty Williams, *My Old Confederate Home: A Respectable Place for Civil War Veterans* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010); Richard A. Serrano, *Last of the Blue and Gray: Old Men, Stolen Glory, and the Mystery That Outlived the Civil War* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 2013); James Alan Marten, *Sing Not War: The Lives of Union & Confederate Veterans in Gilded Age America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

[63] Sari Edelstein, *Adulthood and Other Fictions: American Literature and the Unmaking of Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 2-3.

[64] For studies on elderly slaves and ex-slaves in the South, see David Doddington, '"Old Fellows": Age, Identity, and Solidarity in Slave Communities of the Antebellum South', *Journal of Global Slavery* 3, no. 3 (8 August 2018): 286-312; Leslie J. Pollard, *Complaint To The Lord: Historical Perspectives on the African American Elderly* (Selinsgrove, Pennsylvania: Susquehanna University Press, 1996); Stacey K Close, *Elderly Slaves of the Plantation South* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1997).

the southern context. Historically, medical practitioners, policy makers, and commentators have regularly perceived the South as a metaphorical and literal laboratory to test the extreme health issues of the nation. Karen Kruse Thomas goes as far to argue that the South has been the 'crucible of American health policy'.[65] This perception of the South as a uniquely 'sick' place had immediately severe consequences for African Americans and to a lesser degree the region's poor white population, who were subject to experimentations, as well as derogatory narratives about their genetic 'failings'. This medical perspective of the South also shaped the significance of a *healthy* old age in the southern context. Since the colonial period, a green old age frequently has been used as a political signifier of the wellbeing of the nation's 'body politic'. As W. Andrew Achenbaum argues, 'bills of mortality were thought to affirm the relative healthfulness of conditions in the New World compared to the Old.'[66] For many non-southerners, the health and longevity of older southerners, like countless other real and imagined metrics, 'proved' the South was a 'backwards' region that let down the nation's reputation. Many white southerners, meanwhile, subtly suggested that the good health and extreme longevity of Confederate veterans and southern blacks were evidence of the benevolence of the Old South and the system of slavery, and the vitality of the Confederate tradition.

Two social institutions also help frame the place of the aged in the South: the family and the church. By and large, the rural southern home was more likely to be occupied by a multigenerational family that entailed close intergenerational relations between younger

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[65] Karen Kruse Thomas, *Deluxe Jim Crow: Civil Rights and American Health Policy, 1935-1954* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 4; Mariam O. Fofana, 'The Spectre of Race in American Medicine', *Medical Humanities* 39, no. 2 (2013): 137-141; Benjamin Roy, 'Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment: Biotechnology and the Administrative State', in *Tuskegee's Truths: Rethinking the Tuskegee Syphilis Study*, ed. Susan M. Reverby (Chapel Hill, NC: University North Carolina Press, 2000), 299-317; Marcie Cohen Ferris, '"The Deepest Reality of Life": Southern Sociology, the WPA, and Food in the New South', *Southern Cultures* 18, no. 2: Food (2012): 6-31; Britt Rusert, '"A Study in Nature": The Tuskegee Experiments and the New South Plantation', *Journal of Medical Humanities* 30, no. 3 (September 2009): 155-71

[66] W. Andrew Achenbaum, 'Delineating Old Age: From Functional Status to Bureaucratic Criteria', in *Age in America: The Colonial Era to the Present*, ed. Nicholas L. Syrett and Corinne T. Field (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 302.

members and their real and fictive elderly kin.[67] An essential ingredient to what Bertram Wyatt-Brown describes as a code of 'southern honour' was familial respect for elders. For example, as late as 1940, a rural sociologist in Kentucky found that only 5 percent of all males in the state had names that were unaffiliated with those of previous generations. 70 percent of the men in the study were named after their fathers.[68] As Wyatt Brown argues, such studies built on older traditions in the South that emphasised 'male ancestors on both sides of the family tree' , thereby helping 'cement solidarity between grandchildren and grandparents'.[69] Equally, 'Grandfather clauses', which several southern states used around the turn of the century to disenfranchise blacks, while not denying poor whites the right to vote, were based on a kind of hereditary reasoning, the legacies of which arguably reinforced generational ties by fusing grandparent-child relations to racialised ideas of citizenship.[70] These realities are reflected throughout this study in the naming of musicians as Grandpa/Granny or Uncle/Aunt. These terms could denotate older age or a sense of seniority and pseudo-kinship that correlated with a wider sense that southerners were especially reverential towards their family elders. At the same time, a range of power dynamics and often ageist assumptions were involved with literally overfamiliar naming practices.

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[67] Cheryl Elman and Andrew S. London, 'Racial Differences in Multigenerational Living Arrangements in 1910', *Social Science History* 35, no. 3 (2011): 275-322. For the demographic make-up of southern households in the antebellum era, see Joan E. Cashin, 'Households, Kinfolk, and Absent Teenagers: The Demographic Transition in the Old South', *Journal of Family History* 25, no. 2 (4 January 2000): 141-57; Peter W. Bardaglio, *Reconstructing the Household: Families, Sex, and the Law in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

[68] James S. Brown published his findings from his 1940 study on family life in Kentucky in 1952 James S. Brown, *The Family Group in a Kentucky Mountain Farming Community* (Lexington: University of Kentucky, 1952), 7-10.

[69] Wyatt-Brown argues that these Old South traditions, which persisted into the twentieth century served a variety of functions, most importantly in sustaining gender roles in the southern family. Wyatt-Brown also shows how these practices differed to the North in the same period: Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (London: Oxford University Press, 1982), 121-125.

[70] Some caution must be had in reading too much into the generational effect of grandfather clauses in the South as their implementation varied across different southern states: Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South*, 289, 304.

As with familial relationships, southern religions, particularly the more prominent Christian denominations in the South - Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian - were important sources of ideas about old age. The fundamental Christian tenet to 'honor thy father and mother', combined with numerous examples of biblical elders such as Abraham, Gideon, and David who lived to a 'good old age', informed the spiritual worldview on ageing amongst southerners and Americans generally. The occasionally peculiar strains of evangelicalism and fundamentalism amongst southerners replicated and, in some cases, intensified this reverence for the elderly. These feelings had particular consequences in an era of mounting secular challenges to spiritual authority, and a parallel strengthening of conservative religiosity, not least in the struggles over the law, evolution, and education in the 1920s. More nostalgic ideas of how religious life 'used to be' crept into southern and US discourse through the rhetoric of 'old-time religion', an idea that gained traction in popular culture at the same time as 'old-time music' and held some of the same hallmarks. Although the relationship between roots music and religion in the South could be just as vexed as it was intimate, the desire for a 'revival' of old-time religion contributed to varying degrees to the draw of aged southerners in southern music.[71]

In general, what unites many of these idiosyncrasies of a 'southern old age' is the commonly held notion that the South is, as James Peacock puts it, a 'prisoner to its history'.[72] This intimate sense of the ever present past has been a recurrent theme in southern studies. In 1958, C. Vann Woodward, part-searching for and part-questioning 'southern identity', found that the only characteristic left intact amongst southerners was their 'unique

[71] For the proliferation of ideas about old-time religion during this period, see Douglas Carl Abrams, *Selling the Old-Time Religion: American Fundamentalists and Mass Culture, 1920-1940* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001), 9, 100.
[72] James Peacock, *Grounded Globalism: How the U.S. South Embraces the World* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007), 249. In a similar line of thought, W. Fitzhugh Brundage argues that '[s]outherners, after all, have the reputation of being among the most historically oriented of peoples and of possessing the longest, most tenacious memories': William Fitzhugh Brundage, 'Introduction: No Deed but Memory', in *Where These Memories Grow: History, Memory, and Southern Identity*, ed. William Fitzhugh Brundage (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 2.

historic experience'.[73] James Cobb came to a similar conclusion that a 'shared sense of a common past' was a foundational dimension of southern identity.[74] Roots music, by virtue of its name alone, also ties into the notion that southerners were and remain almost inescapably 'rooted' to a remembered or imagined past. W. J. Cash in his famous treatise on the 'southern mind' describes the modern South as a 'tree with many age rings, with its limbs and trunk bent and twisted by all the winds of the years, but with its tap root still in the Old South'.[75] This dissertation adds to this rich research the idea that aged roots musicians were important symbolic carriers of the particularly heavy 'burden of southern history'. If, as Marcel Proust famously observed, age is 'embodied time', then aged southerners embodied a unique set of southern temporalities.[76] Importantly, however, this heightened proximity between the South and its past, is often expressed as a desire to return to the *status quo ante*, usually viewed in this period as the antebellum era, was accompanied by a sense of loss and fatalism. In Edward Ayers words, the South has 'always seemed to live on the edge of extinction, the good as well as the bad perpetually disappearing.'[77] Real and imagined elderly southerners, by virtue of their age, captured some of these tensions.

Age and Roots Music

Clearly, the 'aged South' has a long and convoluted history, a history which this dissertation seeks to illuminate in new ways by considering how age played an important role in southern roots music. In doing so, it builds on an expanding literature on early roots

[73] Woodward, of course, was writing at beginning of ever greater activity Civil Rights Movement and a period of arguably more intense upheavals of white southern 'tradition': Woodward, 'The Search for Southern Identity', 17-18.
[74] Cobb, Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity, 6.
[75] W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1941), x.
[76] Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time, Vol. 6: Finding Time Again*, trans. Ian Patterson (London: Penguin, 2002), 11-17.
[77] Edward L. Ayers, 'What We Talk about When We Talk about the South', in *All Over the Map: Rethinking American Regions*, ed. Edward L. Ayers et al. (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 68-69.

music.[78] Some of this scholarship either builds on or challenges a 'southern origins thesis', which, broadly speaking, claims roots music was intimately, and sometimes exclusively, shaped by and connected to the southern experience.[79] As most of this literature shows, roots music has been a vital aspect of southern musical culture, but also one of the South's most

[78] Some key texts on roots music include Patrick Huber, *Linthead Stomp: The Creation of Country Music in the Piedmont South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008); Jeffrey J. Lange, *Smile When You Call Me a Hillbilly: Country Music's Struggle for Respectability, 1939-1954* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004); Richard A Peterson, *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Benjamin Filene, *Romancing The Folk: Public Memory & American Roots Music* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Brian Ward and Patrick Huber, *A&R Pioneers: Architects of American Roots Music on Record* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2018); Bill C. Malone, *Southern Music, American Music* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2003); David Evans, *Big Road Blues: Tradition and Creativity in the Folk Blues* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982); Barry Mazor, *Ralph Peer and the Making of Popular Roots Music* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2015); Paul Oliver, *Blues Fell This Morning: Meaning in the Blues*, Second Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Jeff Todd Titon, *Early Downhome Blues: A Musical and Cultural Analysis*, Second Edition (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Diane Pecknold, *The Selling Sound: The Rise of the Country Music Industry* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Lerone A. Martin, *Preaching on Wax: The Phonograph and the Shaping of Modern African American Religion* (New York: New York University Press, 2014); Bernard MacMahon, Allison McGourty, and Elijah Wald, *American Epic: The First Time America Heard Itself* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2017). For scholarship on the early recording industry, see William Howland Kenney, *Recorded Music in American Life: The Phonograph and Popular Memory, 1890-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Andre Millard, *America on Record: A History of Recorded Sound*, Second Edition (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Walter Leslie Welch, *From Tinfoil to Stereo: The Acoustic Years of the Recording Industry, 1877-1929*, Second Edition (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994); Tim Brooks, *Lost Sounds: Blacks and the Birth of the Recording Industry, 1890-1919* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005).

[79] The 'southern origins' thesis of country music is associated with pioneering historian Bill Malone, who claims that most country music is tethered to the South, southern culture or a 'southernised' US culture. The April 2014 edition of the *Journal of American Folklore* well summarises both Malone's critics and his defence. It is unfair to single out Malone as the sole endorser of, or, in some authors' eyes, culprit behind, the southern thesis, but his prolific and innovative work in the field is emblematic of a broader historiographical trend: Bill C. Malone, '"The Southern Dissertation": Revisited and Reaffirmed', *Journal of American Folklore* 127, no. 504 (24 April 2014): 226-29. Although the specific terminology is not necessarily reused, a similar kind of 'southern origins' has often been used to delineate the history of blues music, sometimes located its origins specifically in the Mississippi Delta. This tendency is present, if still challenged, in the early work of Samuel Charters and Paul Oliver as well as more recent scholarship: Samuel Charters, *The Country Blues* (New York: Rinehart, 1959); Paul Oliver, *Blues Fell This Morning: Meaning in the Blues*, Second Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Francis Davis, *The History Of The Blues: The Roots, The Music, The People* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 2003).

important cultural exports.[80] The influences of and on southern musical cultures extended far beyond traditional 'southern' borders. Accordingly, this dissertation is also filled with examples where representations of age in 'southern' roots music were both consumed and produced in the West, Midwest, North and across the Atlantic.[81] Roots music therefore serves as an avenue to understand how intersecting notions of southerness and agedness have been both 'created' and 'consumed' within the South and beyond.[82]

While this study is the first to delve in detail into the role of age in roots music, it is not the first scholarly work that attends to age and culture. Media and literature scholars have led the way in considering age as what Sari Edelstein describes as 'a significant cultural and political coordinate' in the production and reception of cultural 'texts'.[83]

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[80] 'Musical culture' is a useful term for understanding the peculiarities of music-making and listening in a particular region or nation, but not one without its criticisms. For an assessment of the term, see Philip V. Bohlman, 'Music and Culture: Historiographies of Disjuncture', in *The Cultural Study of Music: A Critical Introduction*, ed. Martin Clayton, Trevor Herbert, and Richard Middleton (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), 55.

[81] For scholarship that tests the 'southerness' of different roots musics, see Joe Carr and Alan Munde, *Prairie Nights to Neon Lights: The Story of Country Music in West Texas* (Lubock: Texas Tech University Press, 1996); Michael C. Scoggins, *The Scotch-Irish Influence on Country Music in the Carolinas: Border Ballads, Fiddle Tunes and Sacred Songs* (Charleston, South Carolina: History Press, 2013); Chad Berry, ed., *The Hayloft Gang: The Story of the National Barn Dance* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008); Gerald Haslam, Alexandra Haslam Russell, and Richard Chon, eds., *Workin' Man Blues: Country Music in California* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2012); Peter La Chapelle, *Proud to Be an Okie: Cultural Politics, Country Music, and Migration to Southern California* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2007); Patrick Huber, *Linthead Stomp: The Creation of Country Music in the Piedmont South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008); Patrick Huber, 'The New York Sound: Citybilly Recording Artists and the Creation of Hillbilly Music, 1924-1932', *Journal of American Folklore* 127, no. 504 (2014): 140-58; Lynn Abbott and Doug Seroff, *The Original Blues: The Emergence of the Blues in African American Vaudeville* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2017); Paige A. McGinley, *Staging the Blues: From Tent Shows to Tourism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); Gerhard Kubik, *Africa And The Blues* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999); Brian Ward and Patrick Huber, *A&R Pioneers: Architects of American Roots Music on Record*; Jill Terry and Neil A Wynn, eds., *Transatlantic Roots Music: Folk, Blues, and National Identities* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012).

[82] This builds on the ideas of Karen L. Cox and others: Cox, *Dreaming of Dixie*; Martyn Bone, Brian Ward, and William A. Link, eds., *Creating and Consuming the American South* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2015).

[83] Even Edelstein concedes that her discipline has tended to focus on childhood and adolescence, rather than old age or the life course as a whole: Edelstein, *Adulthood and Other Fictions*, 2. Some studies of US literature (including some southern authors) and

Equally, age has become topical in popular music studies, where the analytical tools from musicology, cultural studies, sociology, psychology, and feminist and critical race theory have helped provoke important questions about age aesthetics, ageism, age-appropriateness, and notions of selfhood over the life course.[84] Nevertheless, some gaps remain in the scholarship. Firstly, scholars focus on the stereotyping and underrepresentation of older people in popular culture. While this dissertation adds to the literature a litany of examples of the former problem, it largely departs from the latter issue by instead showing how older persons and images of old age were *over*represented in early roots music, at least relative to other musical genres. Secondly, much music scholarship centres on older audiences, particularly of genres associated in their early formation with various youth cultures since the Second World War, such as rock and roll, pop, punk, and hip-hop.[85] This dissertation

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media with an age focus include: Sally Chivers, *The Silvering Screen: Old Age and Disability in Cinema* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011); Bertram Wyatt-Brown, 'Walker Percy: Autobiographical Fiction and the Aging Process', *Journal of Aging Studies* 3, no. 1 (1 March 1989): 81-89; Emma Domínguez-Rué, 'Good Old Men in the New South: Portraits of Elderly Male Characters in the Fiction of Ellen Glasgow', in *Acculturating Age: Approaches to Cultural Gerontology*, ed. Brian J. Worsfold (Lleida, Spain: Universitat de Lleida, 2011), 263-80; Alice A. Deck, 'Depictions of Elderly Blacks in American Literature', *Explorations in Ethnic Studies* 8 (1985): 15-33; Qiana J. Whitted, '"Using My Grandmother's Life as a Model": Richard Wright and the Gendered Politics of Religious Representation', *Southern Literary Journal* 36, no. 2 (2004): 13-30.

[84] A selection of research on ageing and popular music includes Lisa Colton and Catherine Haworth, eds., *Gender, Age and Musical Creativity* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2015); Jill Harrison and John Ryan, 'Musical Taste and Ageing', *Ageing & Society* 30, no. 4 (May 2010): 649-69; Abigail Gardner and Ros Jennings, eds., *'Rock On': Women, Ageing and Popular Music* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2012); Andrew Blaikie, *Ageing and Popular Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Sheila Whiteley, *Too Much Too Young: Popular Music, Age and Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Richard Leppert and George Lipsitz, '"Everybody's Lonesome for Somebody": Age, the Body and Experience in the Music of Hank Williams', *Popular Music* 9, no. 3 (1990): 259-274; C. Lee Harrington, Denise Bielby, and Anthony R. Bardo, eds., *Aging, Media, and Culture* (Lexington Books, 2014); E. Ann Kaplan, 'Trauma and Aging: Marlene Dietrich, Melanie Klein, and Marguerite Duras', in *Figuring Age: Women, Bodies, Generations*, ed. Kathleen Woodward (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 171-194. Karen Burland and Stephanie E. Pitts, 'Understanding Jazz Audiences: Listening and Learning at the Edinburgh Jazz and Blues Festival', *Journal of New Music Research* 39, no. 2 (1 June 2010): 125-134; Abigail Gardner and Ros Jennings, *Aging and Popular Music in Europe* (London: Routledge, 2019). A special issue of *Popular Music* in 2012 also brought together several researchers in the field: Jan Fairely and Murray Forman (eds), 'As Time Goes By: Music, Dance and Ageing', special issue of *Popular Music* 31, no. 2 (May 2012).

[85] A notable recent exception to these trends includes Richard Elliot's work on older singers, including those from less well-trodden musical genres, such as Ralph Stanley (bluegrass)

expands the horizons of the field in three ways: by journeying earlier in time, to the first half of the twentieth century; by investigating a genre of music occupied by a range of representations of old age; and by focusing on musicians and depictions of old age, as well as aged audiences.

From this vast and expanding literature on age and music, three scholarly frameworks are particularly relevant to this dissertation. First are the notions of 'lateness' or 'late style' that were first articulated by Theodor Adorno, and later expanded on by Edward Said and others. Essentially, these theories contend that certain artistic expressions can be attributed to specific chronological stages of an artist's life, thereby making it possible to separate careers into 'early', 'middle' and 'late' periods.[86] The concept of late style certainly informs a central argument of this dissertation that many audiences and promoters recognised and depicted a certain kind of 'lateness' in the performances of aged musicians. However, many elderly roots musicians in this early period were only recorded in their 'late' period. This makes it near impossible to ascertain how their artistry in later life differed to their 'early' or 'middle' periods. Moreover, this dissertation reveals that many contemporaries enjoyed or promoted aged musicians precisely because their style in older age was supposedly *un*changed from their 'early period', even despite clear signs of physical decline.

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and Frank Sinatra (swing). However, even Elliot discusses some classic 'baby-boomer'-era acts, including Leonard Cohen, Bob Dylan, and Joni Mitchell: Richard Elliott, *The Late Voice: Time, Age and Experience in Popular Music* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015). There are several reasons for these narrow foci on music and age, but a reasonable explanation is the generational biases of the predominantly 'baby-boomer' generation of researchers. For more on this tendency, see Elliott, *The Late Voice*, 4-5.

[86] To avoid confusion, late style is a relative term, so does not necessarily always connotate an 'old age style' as much as it does ideas of maturity and development: Theodor Adorno, 'Late Style in Beethoven', in *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 564-583; Edward Said, *On Late Style: Music and Literature Against the Grain* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006); Sam Smiles and Gordon McMullan, eds., *Late Style and Its Discontents: Essays in Art, Literature, and Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

Secondly, building on the principle that ageing is a medical, as well as socially constructed, phenomenon, this dissertation employs an interdisciplinary approach to the body that is characteristic of the medical humanities.[87] This is done with an acute awareness that the task here is not to 'diagnose' historical actors or 'medicalise' the aged. The goal here is to assert that an acquaintance with more recent medical literature on ageing can help explain some of the realities associated with being old in early roots music. Additionally, such knowledge helps deconstruct some of the falsehoods and myths that underlie some of the more fantastical representations of the aged. For example, a running tension throughout this study is between medical and gerontological issues that negatively affected musical skill and physical capacities, and perceptions of the emotive power of music making in older age. Arguably, many promoters, audiences, and some performers, expressed ideas about the aged voice akin to Roland Barthes' conception of the 'grain' of the voice. This vague, yet ascertainable 'grain' in the voice or performance of older artists provided listeners a sense of their character, lived experience, and authenticity.[88] This dissertation shows how both abstract ideas about the 'grain' of aged performance, and the medical realities of ageing, interacted in early roots music.

In this respect, this project is also influenced by the field of disability studies which has done much to elucidate the long history of disabled and 'deviant' bodies in the entertainment industry.[89] While age is not disabling per se, various ailments, conditions, and even certain disabilities are age-related, or their effects are intensified in older age.[90] A material object like the walking cane, for example, which features repeatedly in this

[87] For a survey of research into the ageing voice, see Barbara Prakup, 'Acoustic Measures of the Voices of Older Singers and Nonsingers', *Journal of Voice* 26, no. 3 (1 May 2012): 341-350.
[88] Roland Barthes, 'The Grain of the Voice', in *Image-Music-Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 179-189.
[89] For an overview of advances made in disability studies, see Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, 'Disability Studies: A Field Emerged', *American Quarterly* 65, no. 4 (23 December 2013): 915-926.
[90] It notable, for example, that issues relating to old age regularly feature in Kim E. Nielsen's extensive history of disability in the US: Kim E. Nielsen, *A Disability History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012), 5, 22, 47, 75.

dissertation, is indicative of both age *and* disability. Often stigmatic tropes relating to disability and poor health, such as weakness, weirdness, the grotesque, incapacity, vulnerability, and pity, were associated with older musicians. The work of scholars like George McKay, who use 'crip theory' in the context of popular music to understand the 'out-of-controllability' of the 'pop body', proves a useful grounding for much of this dissertation. Essentially, the bodies of aged musicians were 'othered' in a variety of ways.[91] As with disabled musicians, the 'decaying' aged body, as visible and audible in grey hair, wrinkles, reading glasses, hearing aids, and jittery vocals, was often imbued with certain cultural meanings.[92] Equally, depictions of the elderly that kicked back, sometimes literally, against such stereotypes feature regularly in this study. A key theme regarding the body is how contemporaries represented aged southerners' bodies as somewhere on a spectrum between *debilitation* and *virility*, conditions which symbolically stood in for feelings of pessimism or optimism about the 'strength' of varying elements of southern culture. At the same time, this dissertation also argues that depictions of embodied age were particularly meaningful in a new era of mass media in which average Americans could hear *disembodied* music through recordings and radio broadcasts.[93]

Sources and Methodology

[91] George McKay, *Shakin' All Over: Popular Music and Disability* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2013), 1-2; Other scholars have explored disability in classical music, including Joseph N. Straus, *Extraordinary Measures: Disability in Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[92] This is not to equate the experiences of older people with those with disabilities. Whereas the disabled body is constituted by what disability scholars call 'persistent stares', the aged body is often made invisible. For 'crip theory' which builds on feminist ideas of the 'gaze', see Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 26; Rosemarie Garland-Thompson, *Staring: How We Look* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[93] For the significance of ideas of disembodied sound, or, to use Mark Katz's phrase, 'invisibility', to early receptions of recorded music, see Mark Katz, *Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010), 18-24.

This dissertation employs some of the shared methodologies between age studies and American studies, particularly the 'reading' of a range of textual, visual, material, and aural sources in order to better understand the role of old age and ageing in the production, promotion, preservation, and reception of roots music. Due to longstanding class- and race-based prejudices of roots music as 'low' culture', the historical record does not always adequately account for some central details of roots music history. Still, what materials have survived, and therefore constitute much of the evidence for the arguments put forward in this dissertation, form a worthy arsenal in assessing the age context in southern roots music. The kinds of 'texts' analysed here include commercial and folkloric phonograph recordings, radio scripts and 'transcriptions' (industry terminology for pre-recorded broadcasts), oral histories, photographs, graphic artwork, a smattering of home movies, television, and film, and a range of print culture such as newspapers, sheet music, song books, trade periodicals, fan magazines, promotional souvenirs, brochures, booklets, fan mail, field notes, and autobiographies.

Each of these artefacts is problematic in their own way. The inherently transient nature of live concerts and radio, for example, means it is often impossible to know exactly how such performances *sounded*.[94] Equally, many scholars have noted the issues involved in listening to recorded music as direct expressions of contemporary attitudes.[95] Furthermore,

[94] Historians of early radio recognise the difficult in investigating radio programmes which are broadcast and, for the most part, never recorded. Nor is it possible to hear programmes in their original context. Susan Douglas describes radio as 'the most ephemeral historical records in all of the mass media': Douglas, *Listening In*, 9; Michele Hilmes, *Radio Voices: American Broadcasting, 1922-1952* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Susan Smulyan, *Selling Radio: The Commercialization of American Broadcasting, 1920-1934* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994).

[95] However, there exists a growing literature on the meanings and real-world impacts of recorded songs from or relating to the South that includes, but is not limited to John Bush Jones, *Reinventing Dixie: Tin Pan Alley's Songs and the Creation of the Mythic South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015); Martin, *Preaching on Wax*; John Minton, *78 Blues: Folksongs and Phonographs in the American South* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008); Huber, *Linthead Stomp*; Bill C. Malone, *Singing Cowboys and Musical Mountaineers: Southern Culture and the Roots of Country Music* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003); Brian Ward, *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness and Race Relations* (London: UCL, 1998); Guido van Rijn,

there is a dearth of sources about one-off concerts, local radio stations, less well-known or adequately preserved recordings, or obscure musicians and industry personnel, let alone the often 'silent' roots music consumers. By contrast, the 'texts' surrounding certain fiddle contests (e.g. the Georgia Fiddlers' Convention), radio programmes (WSM's *Grand Ole Opry*), record labels (Victor), musicians (Uncle Dave Macon), and folkloric archives (the Archive of American Folk Song at the Library of Congress), tend to be better preserved than others. Where possible this dissertation attempts to strike a tricky balance: to explore more academically well-trodden institutions, terrains, and characters but from the new perspective of old age, while also using the age frame to widen the horizons of the field with more forgotten or unfamiliar faces, places, and music, among them the country music star Archie Campbell's early career as a 'Grandpappy' characterisation, the choice of old peoples' homes as sites for folkloric recordings, and blues lyrics concerning sexual impotence.

The archival footprints of early roots musicians differ in size and visibility according to their contemporary popularity or their later 'revival', but also due to a range of structural power dynamics. For example, more can be said of the life of the well-recorded and canonised Uncle Dave Macon than for the barely recorded and relatively obscure Capt. Moses Bonner. Yet Bonner, a relatively well-off, white male performer, left more of a paper trail than his more working-class equivalents such as Uncle Jimmy Thompson, or women and African Americans, such as Granny Harper or black fiddler Bill Katon. Equally, many of the older roots musicians in this period were too old to have lived through to the postwar roots music revival when a still reasonably niche coalition of fans, musicians, and academics began to treat early roots music and its archival legacies with the respect needed to justify its proper documentation and investigation. Postwar studies of early roots music occasionally mentioned age issues, but most were unconcerned with age as a central factor to the music's

Roosevelt's Blues: African-American Blues and Gospel Songs on FDR (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997); Oliver, *Blues Fell This Morning*; Evans, *Big Road Blues*.

development, or as a crucial element in explaining its popularity and cultural significances.[96] Many of the postwar generation of roots music scholars relied heavily on the testimonies and personal archives of aged musicians who in their own younger days had been played alongside some of the subjects of this dissertation. This situation means more is known about musicians who were relatively young in the 1920s, such as 'Eck' Robertson, than those who were old, like Henry C. Gilliland, with whom Robertson recorded with.[97]

As much as possible, this dissertation attempts to amplify the 'voices' of the aged as well deconstruct depictions or 'visions' of old age.[98] However, a configuration of the racist, sexist, classist, and ageist perspectives of the period meant that those controlling the levers of power and representation in southern roots music - promoters, the press, radio hosts, record producers, and folklorists - were often the ones who mediated the performance and perspectives of aged musicians and audiences. This limitation means that this dissertation, out of necessity, often says more about how age was represented than how it was experienced. Similarly, while reasonable speculations are made throughout about the draw of old musicians or depictions of old age, the present-day scholar can never fully explain the infinite reasons that lay at the heart of a listener or consumer's enjoyment of a particular piece of music, or artist, or genre. Despite some notable exceptions, the relative scarcity of sources that provide consumer or listener feedback makes it hard to understand why so many embraced the aged South in the music realm. Still, if these important caveats are put aside,

[96] Most scholars date the first historical appreciation of barn dance radio, rather than just hillbilly records, to Archie Green's work in the 1960s: Archie Green, 'Hillbilly Music: Source and Symbol', *Journal of American Folklore* 78, no. 309 (1965): 204-228.
[97] Ageing played a second role in this process. For example, when Earl V. Spielman interviewed Robertson for *John Edwards Memorial Foundation Quarterly* (hereafter *JEMF Quarterly*) in the 1960s, the then elderly fiddler was in an economically insecure circumstance and was, at least according to Spielman, somewhat resentful of the lack of artistic and financial recognition he had received over the years. Arguably, his advanced years made him more bitter in his reminiscences of the 1920s, causing him to give a more biased account of Gilliland's role in their commercial recording endeavours: Earl V. Spielman, 'An Interview with Eck Robertson', *JEMF Quarterly* 28 (Winter 1972): 179-187.
[98] This tension between social realities and cultural representation is key feature of the now well-established field of critical gerontology: Thomas Cole et al., eds., *Voices and Visions of Aging: Toward a Critical Gerontology* (New York: Springer Publishing Company, 1992).

what is salvageable from the historical record at least provides a new springboard onto an otherwise academically neglected, but significant historical phenomenon.

Chapter Outline

This dissertation is divided into five chapters, each of which provoke questions about how age operated in separate, if not entirely isolated, realms of southern roots music. Chapter One explores the importance of notions of old age to old fiddlers' contests in the first three decades of the twentieth century South, a period that saw the relatively old, vernacular tradition grow into a media phenomenon. Historians regularly present these incredibly popular live events as the breeding grounds for what later became country music.[99] This chapter assesses how aged white southerners and Confederate veterans in particular, as performers, mascots, and audiences, were key players in their development. Chapter Two traces the interwar careers of six aged white acts who were typical of the first cohort of elderly performers to make old-time records or appear on 'barn dance' radio shows. This chapter explains how and why the music industries, including some older musicians themselves, 'sold' ideas about old age to consumers and audiences.

Chapter Three retains a focus on barn dance radio, but shifts forward in time, exploring a hitherto academically neglected phenomenon roughly between the 1930s and 1950s in which young old-time acts pretended to be elderly. This comic spectacle, what here is termed 'age masquerade', helps us to better understand the artistic and commercial processes whereby old age was 'produced' and 'sold'. Chapter Four continues on the theme of age representation by focusing on some young southern artists, both black and white, who portrayed old age lyrically and musically on old-time and race records from the 1920s to the 1940s. Finally, Chapter Five unpacks how age figured in the world of folkloric research, and specifically the efforts made by father-and-son folklorist team John and Alan Lomax to

[99] The list of country music histories that cite old fiddlers' contests as formative locales for the industry is extensive. A classic example is Bill C. Malone and Tracey Laird, *Country Music U.S.A*, 50th Anniversary Edition (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018), 21-25.

document southern African American roots music for the Library of Congress in the 1930s. This chapter pinpoints how age figured into this era of prolific documentation for the Lomaxes, a period that encompassed their first years researching with institutional backing, their relatively innovative, if not entirely ground-breaking use of recording technology to document southern roots music, and evolution of their infamously problematic relationships with African American music and black musicians.

The forty-five-year period covered here involved a host of radical changes to southern society. As such, some of the age themes discussed here were caused more by immediate events and contexts than longer-term historical narratives and trajectories. In general, however, this dissertation argues that, at least with the perspective of old age in mind, many of the wider trends referenced here did have their continuities across and between the familiar but often obfuscating chrononyms of the early twentieth century, such as 'the interwar period', the '1920s', or 'the New Deal years'. The occasional flitting back and forth in time within and between these chapters therefore reflects the larger aim of this dissertation to articulate a 'structure of feeling' that existed across these years about the 'aged South', rather than simply a chronological history.

Although the focus here is on the first half of the twentieth century, several memories, dreams, and legacies of the nineteenth century loom large throughout this project. Likewise, echoes of the stories in these chapters reverberated into the second half of the century, particularly in the postwar roots music revivals of the 1950s and 1960s. Arguably, many of the age issues discussed here became *more* prominent and complex in this later era, particularly as a whole roots revival 'industry' arose to 'revive' elderly musicians who first recorded in the 1920s and 1930s. However, rewinding the clock to this earlier period helps reconceptualise a standard chronology of roots music history that separates the interwar era

from the postwar revival: the age frame of this dissertation suggests that early roots music was a 'revival' in the most fundamental sense of the term.[100]

The factors of gender and race have also shaped the architecture of this dissertation. The first three chapters are skewed towards male acts. This may come as surprising given the more general contemporary belief of this period that many southern women held particularly powerful duties to God and nation to rear children and grandchildren and tend to the moral probity of the greater community. Despite this veneration of (grand)motherhood, there were very few 'Granny' acts compared to 'Grandpas'. Fiddle contests and commercial old-time music were generally more male-dominated events. However, that a small number of younger female acts managed to achieve fame in these fields suggests that gendered ideas about old age had an acutely negative impact on older female acts. As feminist scholars and female musicians demonstrate, the patriarchal music industry has and continues to make special efforts to sexualise female acts. Kristine McCusker argues, in the context of barn dance radio, that the 'sale' of sexuality in old-time music existed concurrently with representations of homely and innocent female propriety. The expectation that female performers should be young and pretty disadvantaged older female musicians, who lived in a broadly sexist-ageist culture in which the aged female body was regularly desexualised or vulgarised.[101] However, this dissertation shows that older women were not entirely unrepresented in southern roots music. An albeit smaller number of older women made appearances on commercial radio, while a great deal more were recorded by folklorists because of gendered assumptions of their roles as 'mothers' or 'nurturers' of vernacular

[100] Some key works on the postwar 'folk revival' take a similar perspective on the continuities in the movement over the twentieth century, but few have commented on the central role of the aged as a persistent theme: Ronald D. Cohen, *Rainbow Quest: The Folk Music Revival and American Society, 1940-1970* (Amberst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002); Cantwell, *When We Were Good.*

[101] For feminist perspectives on sexuality and old age see Simone de Beauvoir, *The Coming of Age* (New York: Putnam, 1972); Silvia Stoller, ed., *Simone de Beauvoir's Philosophy of Age: Gender, Ethics, and Time* (Berlin, Germany: De Gruyter, 2014); Toni Calasanti, 'Feminist Gerontology and Old Men', *Journals of Gerontology* 59, no. 6 (1 November 2004): 305-14; Kristine M. McCusker, *Lonesome Cowgirls and Honky Tonk Angels: The Women of Barn Dance Radio* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 139-40.

traditions. Equally, old-time and race records were outlets for young men and women to express certain ideas about femininity in older age.

Similarly, it is only in the last two chapters that black musicians are considered in substantial detail. Essentially, this dissertation shows that there were fewer spaces in commercial and mass mediated music for aged black musicians. The reasons for this discrepancy are complex. In the mid-twentieth century US, because of the racist structures of society at large, and in the music industry, notions of black consciousness, social uplift and self-respect gradually came to the fore. Many of these ideas were articulated and promoted from within the domains of middle-class, college-educated, and urbane black intellectuals, and not the agricultural and factory workers in the South. Nevertheless, such ideas gradually trickled down through black educative programmes, southern churches, labour unions, and widely distributed media such as the *Chicago Defender*. These avenues, amongst many others, tentatively promoted positive notions of black identity. Some early gospel, blues and jazz, though by no means all, was produced and marketed to appeal to these markets. For sure, part of this embrace of black pride and the conception of the 'New Negro' entailed a heightened reverence for older blacks as repositories of early African American, and even African heritage, particularly within black churches and the urban intelligentsia. Similarly, the 'double jeopardy' of being both black and old, even before the expression was first used in that context, has been a significant, if historically neglected battle ground of the African American freedom struggle throughout the twentieth century.[102] However, an increasingly common tendency amongst African Americans was to reject the cultural icons of aged blackness propagated by whites since before the Civil War: the Uncle Toms, Uncle Remuses, and Aunt Jemimas who continued to hold cultural capital well into the twentieth

[102] Towering figures of black intellectual thought, such as W. E. B. Du Bois, and significant organising bodies for African American civil rights, such as the Urban League, took a keen interest in the quality of later life of older African Americans: Leslie J. Pollard, *Complaint To The Lord: Historical Perspectives on the African American Elderly* (Selinsgrove, Pennsylvania: Susquehanna University Press, 1996); Sandra Edmonds Crewe, 'The Task Is Far from Completed: Double Jeopardy and Older African Americans', *Social Work in Public Health* 34, no. 1 (2 January 2019): 122-133.

century. For white Americans, and southerners in particular, these aged 'happy darkies' signified passivity and a resignation to fate that contrasted with the supposedly 'uppity' nature of the young 'New Negro'. Although it risks oversimplification of a complex series of historical transitions, it is possible to understand why an aged African American act might have held less appeal for young, modern, or progressively minded blacks.[103] Still, this dissertation shows that, at least in the domain of race recordings, African American musicians were eager to *depict* a variety of visions of old age, some of which reflected on the racialised society in which they lived. Similarly, this study shows how an intersection of race and age dynamics shaped the allures of aged African American performers for certain white audiences, but particularly folklorists.

[103] Black use of 'Uncle Tom' as derogatory term for 'race traitors' is as old as Harriet Beecher Stowe's original novel of the same name, however it gained greater ground following the use of the term by Marcus Garvey, Alain Locke and members of the New Negro movement and Harlem Renaissance in the 1910s and 1920s: Amy Jacques Garvey, *Garvey & Garveyism* (New York: Collier Books, 1970), 48; Alain Locke, 'Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro', *Survey Graphic*, March 1925, 6; Brando Simeo Starkey, *In Defense of Uncle Tom: Why Blacks Must Police Racial Loyalty* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Riché Richardson, *Black Masculinity and the U.S. South: From Uncle Tom to Gangsta* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007); Adena Spingarn, 'Writing the Old Negro in a New Century: James Weldon Johnson and the Uses of Uncle Tom's Cabin', *American Literature* 89, no. 1 (March 2017): 29-56; Jo-Ann Morgan, *Uncle Tom's Cabin as Visual Culture*, Second Edition (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2016); Sarah Meer, *Uncle Tom Mania: Slavery, Minstrelsy, and Transatlantic Culture in the 1850s* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005); Rebecca Carroll, ed., *Uncle Tom Or New Negro?: African Americans Reflect on Booker T. Washington and Up from Slavery One Hundred Years Later* (New York: Broadway Books/Harlem Moon, 2006); Nathaniel A. Windon, 'A Tale of Two Uncles: The Old Age of Uncle Tom and Uncle Remus', *Common-Place* 17, no. 2, available at http://common-place.org/book/a-tale-of-two-uncles-the-old-age-of-uncle-tom-and-uncle-remus, accessed 2 August 2019; Maurice M. Manring, 'Aunt Jemima Explained: The Old South, the Absent Mistress, and the Slave in a Box', *Southern Cultures* 2, no. 1 (4 January 2012): 19-44.

Chapter One

The Older the Better: Old Fiddlers' Contests in the South

In 1929, classical music magazine *Etude* explained to readers that 'Youth has the call for almost every other form of entertainment, but in this instance the public wants its country fiddlers "old" - the older the better.'[1] The *Etude* writer succinctly captured a cultural phenomenon of the period between the turn of the twentieth century and the Great Depression: the 'old country fiddler' had become a national icon. The event that elevated the old country fiddler to this position was the old fiddlers' contest: a social gathering in which mostly white, male, and older fiddlers 'competed' with one another - playfully or literally - in front of live audiences. Old fiddlers' contests, also known as 'fiddle conventions', were particularly popular in the South, but also found elsewhere in the country, and drew the curiosity of the mass media and 'elite' audiences, such as those who read *Etude*. Beyond acknowledging old fiddlers' contests as one of the breeding grounds for what became known as 'old-time', 'hillbilly' and then 'country music', few scholars have analysed southern fiddlers' contests as a collective phenomenon, and even fewer have recognised the significance of age to the events: old fiddlers' contests were typically considered places where one could hear *old* fiddlers perform *old*-time music, often for the specific benefit of *older* audiences.[2] Some scholars, such as country music historian Richard Peterson,

[1] 'Aged Fiddlers,' *Etude*, February 1929, 133.

[2] Historians have studied fiddle contests more as precursors to recorded and broadcast country music, rather than valid objects of study in their own right: Tony Russell, *Country Music Originals: The Legends and the Lost* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Patrick Huber, *Linthead Stomp: The Creation of Country Music in the Piedmont South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008); Joyce H. Cauthen, *With Fiddle & Well-Rosined Bow: Old Time Fiddling In Alabama* (Tuscaloosa: University Alabama Press, 2001); Wayne W. Daniel, *Pickin' on Peachtree: A History of Country Music in Atlanta, Georgia* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001); Charles Wolfe, *The Devil's Box: Masters of Southern Fiddling* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1997); Charles K. Wolfe, *Tennessee Strings: Story Country Music Tennessee* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1977); Gene Wiggins, *Fiddlin' Georgia Crazy: Fiddlin' John Carson, His Real World, And The World of His Songs* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1987). For two notable exceptions to this trend, see Gavin James Campbell, *Music and the Making*

recognise that fiddle contestants were depicted as 'old men and a dying breed.'[3] This chapter goes further, however, by dissecting how these depictions were laden with complex and occasionally paradoxical ideas about old age and ageing that add to our understandings of the social function of old fiddlers' contests and what they reveal about the South during the early twentieth century.

Despite the many social, economic and cultural changes that occurred in the South over these three decades, some basic trajectories and key tensions in southern history help explain the old fiddlers' contest phenomenon. The contextual factors of the growth of the southern and national newspaper industry, the revolutionary, if gradual, effect of railways and roads on geographic mobility, and the birth of hundreds of market and mill towns, all enabled performers and audiences to travel to and attend more accessible, larger, well-funded, and better-publicised contests.[4] Although southern fiddle contests never disappeared, most of the bigger contests began to lose media exposure and regular financial backers by the late 1930s as increasing competition from new forms of entertainment, including cinema, radio and phonographs, began to draw away public attention.[5]

The gradual transition towards a modern, 'New South', characterised by real and perceived challenges to previous economic, political, racial, and patriarchal orthodoxies, was an equally important setting for old fiddlers' contests. Such events were geared towards masculine, working-class, rural, and 'southern' preoccupations. Many white southerners held a stake in the contests as a salve for their anxieties concerning the moral and material

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of a New South (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 83-113; Chris Goertzen, *Southern Fiddlers and Fiddle Contests* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2011).

[3] Peterson, *Creating Country Music*, 57.

[4] Edward Ayers has shown that railroads were built faster in the South than the nation as a whole. In 1890, nine out of ten southerners lived in a railroad county. Patrick Huber directly attributes the development of Atlanta's fiddle contests to the growth of small mill towns on the city's fringe: Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South*, 9; Huber, *Linthead Stomp*, 37.

[5] Paul M. Gifford argues that the Depression was a central cause for the national decline of fiddle contests: Paul M. Gifford, 'Henry Ford's Dance Revival and Fiddle Contests: Myth and Reality,' *Journal of the Society for American Music* 4, no. 3 (August 2010): 323.

threats posed by 'modernisation'. Fears of black advance and challenges to segregation, increased female social mobility, political and sexual assertiveness, secularisation, a growing commercial mass popular culture, and the effects of urban living, all pervaded the collective consciousness of the white South to varying degrees. In this context, aged fiddlers harked back to an imagined pastoral, antebellum South characterised in the minds of many by ideas of 'tradition' and 'community'.[6]

The Georgia Old Fiddlers' Convention in Atlanta is a typical example of how tensions relating to the New South intertwined in southern fiddlers' contests. In the Atlanta contests, spectators and reporters understood and presented older contestants as their 'contemporary ancestors', whose supposed geographic and cultural insularity in the Appalachian Mountains had preserved an antiquated, 'uncorrupted' Anglo or Scots-Irish culture. Racial constructions of 'whiteness', then, were at the heart of the Atlanta contests: the first major housing segregation laws in Atlanta occurred two months before the city's inaugural 1913 fiddlers' convention. Another core ingredient that helped form the Atlanta contest was a thriving Lost Cause ideology in the city. Concerns about controlling public memory about the Confederacy and preserving the values of the Old South were rife in this period of Atlanta history, and expressed through monument building, educational programmes, and the integration of aged Confederate veterans into public life.[7]

The Atlanta contest's popularity can also be attributed to the combined interests of poor white farmers, many of whom felt culturally displaced through intra-regional migration, industrialisation and urbanisation, and a growing white urban middle-class, who

[6] A selection of significant studies on the contested idea of the 'New South' includes Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South*; Marjorie Spruill Wheeler, *New Women of the New South: The Leaders of the Woman Suffrage Movement in the Southern States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971).

[7] For collaborations and tensions between Lost Cause and New South advocates in Atlanta, see William A. Link, *Atlanta, Cradle of the New South: Race and Remembering in the Civil War's Aftermath* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Nathan Cardon, *A Dream of the Future: Race, Empire, and Modernity at the Atlanta and Nashville World's Fairs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

patronised the contests to connect themselves to a real or imagined agrarian heritage. The industrial unrest amongst white labour in the mill towns near Atlanta, not least a series of strikes among textile workers in the 1910s, caused anxiety for the city's civic boosters. Fiddlers' contests helped solidify white unity amidst heightened class conflict.[8] Due to these complex race and class politics in Atlanta, the Georgia Fiddle Convention was paradoxically perceived as both a serious event marking out southern white heritage, and a humorous exhibition of 'hillbillies'.[9] Finally, anxieties about southern manhood in Atlanta fed into the appeal of the contest. The new kinds of insecurities that white rural-urban migrants confronted in their increasingly atomised, industrial, urban lives caused a 'crisis of masculinity' that was compounded by gradual sexual and political revolutions in the female sphere.[10] That the first conference of National American Woman Suffrage Association outside of Washington D.C. was held in Atlanta in 1895, and that Georgia laid claim to vocal chapters of both the Woman Equal Suffrage League and National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage indicates some of the tensions surrounding gender at play. It is no surprise in this context of struggle over southern manhood that fiddlers' contests became a competitive, hypermasculine, and occasionally violent 'sport'.[11]

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[8] John A. Burrison, 'Fiddlers in the Alley,' *Atlanta Historical Bulletin* 21, no. 2 (Summer 1977): 59. Campbell also expanded on Burrison's class-based argument: Campbell, *Music and the Making of a New South*, 104.

[9] Campbell, *Music and the Making of a New South*; Steve Goodson, *Highbrows, Hillbillies, and Hellfire: Public Entertainment in Atlanta, 1880-1930* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007); Both Campbell and Goodson build upon Harkins' broader exploration of the hillbilly as a cultural icon, and the cultural impact of its often contradictory representations of poor southern whites: Anthony Harkins, *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[10] Don Harrison Doyle, ed., *New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860-1910* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 136-158; William A. Link, *Atlanta, Cradle of the New South: Race and Remembering in the Civil War's Aftermath* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 1-6, 169-189.

[11] Histories of white southern manhood between Reconstruction and the Second World War are not without their internal debates over the degree of continuity or change in gender roles across this period. Still, the Spanish and First World Wars are typically highlighted as significant junctures, and a scholarly consensus has emerged that, regardless of the reality, many southerners *feared* the pace and intensity of social change: Craig Thompson Friend, ed., *Southern Masculinity: Perspectives on Manhood in the South Since Reconstruction*

Generally speaking, similar tensions, if in different configurations, were underway in other parts of the South. This chapter argues that the significances of age to old fiddlers' contests must be understood within these contexts. However, the appeal of the contests usually was only implicitly associated with immediate concerns about race, class, gender, and regional identity. For many contemporaries, such events would have appeared as community-based, rural-orientated, and comedic entertainment.[12]. Nevertheless, during this period a relatively diverse coalition of white southerners held different, though related, stakes in fiddlers' contests under a tenuous banner of antimodernism and benefited from the abstract sense of security the events provided. This chapter argues that aged fiddlers and older audiences helped to realise this sense of security by cobbling together a vague vision of a past with which many white southerners could agree. Yet, this was not solely escapism. Patrons and audiences used elderly contingents at fiddlers' contests to construct an imagined Old South from where they could frame their critiques of the values of the New South.[13]

Structurally, this chapter is divided into four broad sections. Firstly, it explores just how 'old' and 'southern' fiddlers' contests actually were by exploring their demographic structures and situating them in the transatlantic world. Secondly, it considers how Confederate veterans and other older contingents at the contests served to 'honour' the Old

(Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009); Patrick Huber, 'A Short History of Redneck: The Fashioning of a Southern White Masculine Identity,' *Southern Cultures* 1, no. 2 (January 4, 2012): 145-166; Hugh Campbell, Michael Mayerfeld Bell, and Margaret Finney, eds., *Country Boys: Masculinity And Rural Life* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Penn State Press, 2006); Bryce Traister, 'Academic Viagra: The Rise of American Masculinity Studies,' *American Quarterly* 52, no. 2 (2000): 274-304; Michael S. Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*, Third Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Ted Ownby, *Subduing Satan: Religion, Recreation, and Manhood in the Rural South, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); Dana D. Nelson, *National Manhood: Capitalist Citizenship and the Imagined Fraternity of White Men* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1998).

[12] For example, some media outlets presented old fiddlers' contests as 'funny', 'side-splitting' and 'novelty': 'Carroll County Fair: Bigger And Better Than Ever', *Carroll County Democrat* [Huntingdon, TN], 7 October 1921, 1; '"Fiddlers" Convention at Bijou Draws Crowd', *Atlanta Constitution*, 28 January 1915, 10; Henry Edwards, 'Old Fiddlers Of County Organize An Association', *Tyler Journal* [TX], 13 May 1927, 1; 'Fiddlers' Contest', *Fairmont West Virginian*, 11 May 1905, 8.

[13] Paul V. Murphy, *The Rebuke of History: The Southern Agrarians and American Conservative Thought*, Chapel Hill: University North Carolina Press, 2001), 1-12.

South, through presence, performance, and reminiscence. Thirdly, the chapter unpacks the meanings behind the paradoxical representations of old fiddlers at contests as virile yet debilitated old men. Finally, it considers the role of intergenerationalism at old fiddlers' contests.

Southern Old Fiddlers' Contests

Fiddle contests did not suddenly emerge in the early twentieth century, and nor were they exclusively a southern, or even American phenomenon. Chris Goertzen traces their existence in the region to the late eighteenth century. Antecedent and parallel fiddle contest traditions in Britain, Ireland, Scandinavia, Canada, and elsewhere in the US have their own equally complex histories.[14] However, southern fiddle contests in the early twentieth century, if not unprecedented or unparalleled, were exceptional in their greater institutionalisation and heightened visibility in the public sphere.[15] Equally, as this chapter shows, when organisers, contestants, and the southern and non-southern press discussed southern contests they frequently made reference to Dixie, the Appalachian Mountains, and the Confederacy, indicating such events were perceived as regionally distinct incarnations of a broader transatlantic musical tradition.

If southern fiddle contests were relatively distinct in this regard, they accommodated such an array of audiences, venues, performers and organisers that defining the phenomenon remains problematic. For example, some fiddle contests featured other non-fiddling entertainers, while others were not even competitions. Essentially, fiddlers' contests were neither static or homogenous institutions: a contest in Atlanta in 1893 did not have precisely the same characteristics or local contexts as those in Millersburg, Kentucky in 1922, or Alto,

[14] New England, New York state, Maine, and much of the Midwest also had vibrant fiddle contest traditions in this period: Chris Goertzen, *Southern Fiddlers and Fiddle Contests*, 5.
[15] Charles Wolfe argues that southern fiddle contests prior to the 1890s were typically features of larger programmes, such as holidays, Labor Day or county fairs, and were not unique events in their own right. On this point, Patrick Huber highlights that fiddle contests were merely one medium for public performance in the South, alongside picnics, parades, square dances, barbecues, ice cream suppers, rallies, religious revivals, strikes, and civic clubs: Wolfe, *Tennessee Strings*, 22; Huber, *Linthead Stomp*, 30.

Texas in 1929.[16] While this chapter recognises and embraces what these distinctions between fiddlers' contests can reveal about the plurality of ideas about old age, the primary concern here is more to ask why and how the age component of the contests remained a relatively constant and prominent feature of such events across the South throughout this period.

Ascertaining the actual proportion of 'old' fiddlers at any given contest is difficult given the relative paucity of accounts that detailed their proceedings, but a significant proportion of contestants were in their sixties or older. Newspaper announcements and reports about contests often provided names of contestants, but not always their ages.[17] When they did, however, they made special effort to note those with advanced ages, usually anywhere from fifty to eighty.[18] Equally, fiddlers' names were often prefixed with familial, age-related titles, such as 'Uncle', 'Grandpa', 'Old' or 'Old-Timer'.[19] Reporters regularly noted that fiddle contests were populated by a sea of white, grey, and silver-haired fiddlers and patrons.[20] In 1908, for example, the *Washington Post* noted that at a contest in Charlotte,

[16] With Colonel Adair: That Genial Spirit Issues A Call To The Oldtimers,' *Atlanta Constitution*, 22 September 1893; 'Millersburg County High School Notes,' *Bourbon News* [Paris, KY], 12 May 1922, 8; F. L. Weimar, 'Old Fiddlers To Meet Saturday,' *Alto Herald* [TX], 5 September 1929, 1.

[17] The use of media reports as sources for understanding what went on at fiddlers' contests is also problematic as they rarely detail what occurred backstage, in the audience, or at informal performances and after-parties, spaces which musicologist Chris Goertzen argues were and remain significant features of the events: Goertzen, *Southern Fiddlers and Fiddle Contests*, 47.

[18] A selection of articles that mention the ages of competitors, most of whom were in their seventies, includes: ''Fiddlin' Texans Issue Bold Defiance To Local Bowmen,' *Atlanta Constitution*, 9 October 1919, 6; 'Items Of Interest From Other States,' *Big Sandy News* [Louisa, KY], 4 March 1910, 2; 'Old-Time Fiddlers Furnish Big Treat For 4,000 People,' *Atlanta Constitution*, 20 November 1920, 4.

[19] E.g. 'New Aspirants To Renown Will Seek Fiddler's Crown,' *Atlanta Constitution*, 13 November , 1927, 8; 'Fiddlers Had A Convention,' *Washington Post*, 26 January 1908; 'Fannin Fiddlers Issue Bold Defiance To Entire State,' *Atlanta Constitution*, 9 November 1919, 13; 'Georgia Old-Time Fiddlers Open Convention Thursday,' *Atlanta Constitution*, 16 November 1919, 8; 'Old Fiddlers Contest,' *Refugio Review* [Refugio, TX], 26 April 1901, 1.

[20] See 'Fiddlers Will Hold Annual Convention in Atlanta Feb. 27,' *Atlanta Constitution*, 10 February 1918, 1; Stewart Gelders, 'Surviving Private Of Confederacy Goes to Reunion,' *Atlanta Constitution*, 19 June 1922, 1; 'Fiddling in Georgia,' *Atlanta Constitution*, 1 July 1906, 4; 'Old Fiddlers Convention,' *Johnson City Comet* [TN], 10 May 1900, 1.

North Carolina, nearly 'all the fiddlers were gray-haired'.[21] Contemporary folklorists who ventured into fiddlers' contests also found advanced age to be a central characteristic of the phenomenon. Ballad collector Louise Rand Bascom visited a North Carolina fiddle contest and found not only that 'The tunes are very old' but that the performers were too. Bascom was in awe of one fiddler, aged ninety-four, who performed some of his great-grandfather's 'pieces'.[22]

More significantly, fiddlers' associations, one of the most common organisers of old fiddlers' contests, tended to regulate them on the basis of age. A commonplace rule, borrowed from the sporting world, only permitted competitors over the age of fifty, or sometimes sixty-five.[23] Significantly in a pre-Social Security era, these age brackets sometimes were based not on numerical age but on cultural knowledge. A contest in Houston, Texas, in 1921, for example, was accessible only to competitors 'of the age who still call their instruments fiddles.'[24] Age was enough to warrant rewards. Prizes frequently were awarded to the oldest fiddler (or sometimes the oldest fiddle).[25] The judges at a 1928 contest in Houston were picked because they were the oldest men in the audience.[26] A county fair in Louisville in 1935 featured both a fiddlers' contest and an 'old folks health

[21] 'Fiddlers Had A Convention', *Washington Post*, 26 January 1908, 2.
[22] Louise Rand Bascom, 'Ballads and Songs of Western North Carolina,' *Journal of American Folklore* 22, no. 84 (1909): 239.
[23] It was particularly common at Texan contests to enforce age categories: Molloy, 'Old Fiddlers' Contest To Be Held Here May 4,' *Timpson Weekly Times* [TX], 4 December 1929, 1; Sam Braswell, 'Calling All Fiddlers,' *Coleman Democrat-Voice* [Coleman, TX], 6 September 1945, 11; O. C. Harrison, 'Stage Set for Big Rodeo-Reunion On Thurs., Fri., Sat.,' *Baylor County Banner* [Seymour, TX], 19 July 1945, 1; Henry Edwards, 'Old Fiddlers Contest Held At Troup Free Fair,' *Tyler Journal* [TX], 14 September 1928, 2; 'F.A. Lively Wins First In Houston County Contest,' *Madisonville Meteor* [TX], 4 October 1928, 7.
[24] 'Old Fiddlers Contest To Be Feature of Fair,' *Houston Post* [TX], 5 November 1921, 14.
[25] One contestant, nicknamed 'Old Rip Van Winkle', was awarded a 'fine rug' for being the oldest fiddler at a contest in Hogansville, Georgia, in 1901: 'Lots of Fun at Hogansville,' *Atlanta Constitution*, 26 August 1901, 2. Other examples of contests which included prizes for oldest fiddlers include J. H. Lowry, 'All Sorts of Fiddlers,' *Honey Grove Signal* [TX], 16 February 1900, 4; 'Fiddlers Going To Swainsboro,' *Atlanta Constitution*, 10 September 1905, 1; 'Fiddlers' Convention,' *Atlanta Constitution*, 18 August 1908, 3.
[26] 'F.A. Lively Wins First In Houston County Contest', *Madisonville Meteor* [TX], 10 April 1928, 7.

contest' in which prizes were awarded for the 'healthiest old couples'.[27] Fiddlers' contests were part of wider cultural movement in which the elderly were rewarded not just for their talent or longevity but for reaching a 'healthy old age'.[28] Sometimes, contest profits went solely towards providing transportation costs for aged contestants.[29] Larger fiddlers' associations codified these age-based practices and disseminated them to smaller associations across the South. An association in Brenham, Texas, for example, openly borrowed the age-based guidelines of the East Tennessee Fiddlers' Association.[30] Significantly, these age regulations came from fiddlers' associations whose treasurers and presidents typically were elderly men. It was the aged themselves who often were crafting elderly-only spaces for themselves at a time in which ageist hiring and firing practices were becoming increasingly common practice in both blue- and white-collar jobs across the nation.[31]

If many contests were designed and promoted around their aged contingent, it would be erroneous to conclude that they were all age exclusive. Many young fiddlers performed at contests, including performers who went on to have careers on radio and records, such as Fiddlin' John Carson. However, when the media reported on the presence of younger performers and audiences at fiddlers' contests, it did so with a tone of surprise. For example,

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[27] 'Governor's Day Held At Kentucky Fair', *Courier-Journal* [Louisville, KY], 13 September 1935, 1, 10.
[28] The popular idea of a 'healthy old age' was a characteristic trait of the new discipline of geriatrics, with a number of 'advice' manuals published during this era, as most clearly exemplified by Thomas Bodley Scott, *The Road to a Healthy Old Age: Essays, Lay and Medical* (New York: Holt, 1919). For the medicalisation of old age during this period, see Carole Haber and Brian Gratton, *Old Age and the Search for Security: An American Social History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 143-171.
[29] 'Georgia Fiddlers On Edge for Big Old-Time Reunion,' *Atlanta Constitution*, 7 November, 1920, 7.
[30] John G. Rankin, 'Old Time Ball - Fiddlers Contest,' *Brenham Daily Banner* [TX], 26 May 1900, 1. The three largest associations seem to have been the Georgia Old Time Fiddlers' Association, the Old Time Fiddlers' Association of Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico and Arkansas, and the East Tennessee Fiddlers' Association.
[31] For age restrictions in the southern workplace in the early twentieth century, see Wood, *Retiring Men*, 50-60.

a contest in Swainsboro, Georgia, featured 'many old fiddlers, and young fiddlers, too'.[32] Young fiddlers also competed separately from their elders. One contest pitted 'young men 'gainst the young, and the old men 'gainst the old.'[33] Even if contests were mixed-age events, the press typically published photographs of grizzled, elderly fiddlers with grey hair, wizened beards, walking canes, and wrinkled faces. The foregrounding of these 'colourful' older characters gave the impression that contests revolved around the aged.[34]

The older age of contestants was not entirely unique to southern contests. In the mid-1920s, a fiddle contest 'craze' broke out across northern and midwestern states following Henry Ford's 'revival' of fiddle music and folk dancing. Many of the fiddlers associated with Ford, such as Maine fiddler Mellie Dunham and Jasper Bisbee from rural Michigan, both in their seventies, were just as old as those in the South.[35] The industrialist 'discovered' Bisbee while searching for 'an old fiddler who knew the old tunes'.[36] The tumultuous political and social changes wrought by the First World War were a driving force behind the Ford-endorsed craze for aged rural fiddlers. 'I'm trying in a small way', Ford told a journalist in 1925, 'to help America take a step, even if it is a little one, toward the saner, sweeter idea of life that prevailed in pre-war days.'[37] As in some parts of the

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[32] 'Fiddlers Going To Swainsboro,' *Atlanta Constitution*, 10 September 1905, 1. Fiddlin' Powers, Gid Tanner, Eck Robertson and many more young fiddlers performed at and won fiddle contests: Russell, *Country Music Originals*, 16, 35.

[33] 'Fiddlin' Texans Issue Bold Defiance To Local Bowmen,' *Atlanta Constitution*, 9 October 1919, 6.

[34] Some examples of this proto-photojournalism, see 'United Confederate Veterans Reject Joint Reunion With Northern Survivors,' *Atlanta Constitution*, June 6, 1930, 1; *Atlanta Journal*, 19 February 1914, 4.

[35] Bill C Malone, *Southern Music, American Music* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2003), 11. Historians often mistake Ford's unquestionable appreciation for fiddle music as indicative of his leading role in the nationwide 'revival' of fiddle contests. As Paul Gifford shows, Ford had little personal involvement with organising contests. Fiddle contests predated and continued after the short-lived revival that rose up in his name. However, through Ford's dealers, impersonators, and the print press, what became known contemporaneously as the 'fiddle contest craze' spread across the country: Paul M. Gifford, 'Henry Ford's Dance Revival and Fiddle Contests: Myth and Reality,' *Journal of the Society for American Music* 4, no. 3 (August 2010): 307-338.

[36] 'Fame For A Fiddler,' *Detroit News*, 5 January 1926, cited in Gifford, 'Henry Ford's Dance Revival and Fiddle Contests', 213.

[37] 'Ford Sees New Hope in Dance', *Detroit News*, 11 December 1925, cited in Gifford, 'Henry Ford's Dance Revival and Fiddle Contests', 213.

South, the growing industrialisation of previously rural states such as Maine and Michigan explains the appeal of elderly rural fiddlers in the North. It perhaps was more than merely coincidental that Ford 'sponsored' aged fiddlers considering his name had become an eponym for a certain brand of ruthless, modern industrialism, and his company had become notorious for sacking older, supposedly less 'productive', factory workers.[38]

The Ford fiddle revival obviously complicates any notion of southern exceptionalism regarding old fiddlers' contests. Indeed, some southerners were fascinated by elderly northern fiddlers, flipping on its head Karen Cox's idea that it was northerners who 'consumed' cultural representations of the South.[39] In 1901, one wealthy southerner, while vacationing in Catskill, New York, discovered a fiddler who looked like an 'old Rip Van Winkle', and was so enamoured by him that he invited the seemingly ancient musician to a fiddle contest in Hogansville, Georgia. When the fiddler explained he could not afford to travel that far South, Hogansvillians pitched together to pay for his expenses.[40] Likewise, interregional and international contests nuance any claim that the age dimension of contests was exclusively a 'southern' phenomenon. For example, contestants from Canada, Ireland, and across the US competed at a contest in Lewiston, Maine in 1926. What united all these contestants, however, and those at other contests in or outside the South, was that they were all *old*. The press noted that all the competitors of the Lewiston contest were grey-haired.[41] Interregional contests could stir up debates about the South's status as an especially agrarian

[38] For the Ford Company's ageist hiring and firing practices, see Gregory Wood, *Retiring Men: Manhood, Labor, and Growing Old in America, 1900-1960* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2012), 23-44.
[39] Cox, *Dreaming of Dixie*. Cox's central premise has been challenged by a number of scholars, notably in Bone, Ward, and Link, eds., *Creating and Consuming the American South*.
[40] 'Fiddlers Are To Fiddle At Hogansville,' *Atlanta Constitution*, 20 August 1901, 2. Some southerners were fascinated by northern fiddlers who claimed the title of 'oldest' fiddler. In 1926, the *Forest City Courier* reported that a fiddlers' contest in North Carolina featured the self-proclaimed 'oldest fiddler in the country', a claim challenged by the newspaper alongside a photograph of the whiskered fiddler for readers to decide for themselves: 'Oldest Fiddler,' *Forest City Courier* [NC], 25 March 1926, 13. The *Courier* ran a similar piece on a 1930 contest won by Uncle Billy Smith, a Camden, New Jersey fiddler reputed to be 112 years old: *Forest City Courier*, 6 March 1930, 13.
[41] Louis Lyons, 'Boivin Winner of First Reel,' *Boston Daily Globe*, 6 April 1926, 1.

or ‘old-fashioned’ region. Reporting on an upcoming interregional contest in the nation’s capital in 1917, the *Washington Post* informed readers that contestants ‘will come from the South, the home of wizards of “de fiddle an’ de bow”, and from the North which claims to be the place where the Southern fiddlers came from’[42] Old fiddlers’ contests, then, were part of a broader transatlantic rural imaginary in the early twentieth century. Still, it is significant that contests featuring older fiddlers were more commonplace at southern contests, and that these more or less predated interregional contests or those associated with Ford. In summary, the robust association between southerness and agrarian heritage made the South a particularly prominent producer of old fiddlers’ contests.

Honouring the Old South

On 9 October 1920, the front page of the *Houston Post* featured photographs of greying Confederate veterans attending a fiddlers’ contest in Houston. The caption asked rhetorically ‘Is There a Dixie? These Pictures Prove There Is.’[43] Between the 1890s and 1930s, aged Confederate veterans became commonly associated with fiddlers’ contests. Veterans were often audience members and contestants (even winners) at otherwise ‘civilian’ contests. Likewise, fiddlers’ contests became part of the itineraries of veteran reunions and parades. It is easy to see why veterans became such fixtures of contests. The portability of the fiddle had made it a fixture of army life long before the Civil War, and remained a lifelong hobby for many veterans.[44] However, as the Houston contest suggests,

[42] ‘North And South Fiddlers To Meet’, *Washington Post*, 28 March 1917, 9.
[43] ‘Glory of Dixie Shines in South’s Greatest Parade,’ *Houston Post* [TX], 9 October 1920, 1.
[44] Some examples of fiddlers’ contests as entertainment at veterans’ reunions include ‘The Veterans Meet,’ *Atlanta Constitution*, 22 December 1891, 5; ‘Miss Regina Rambo Made Picturesque Reunion Figure,’ *Atlanta Constitution*, 25 June 1911; Parks Rusk, ‘Old-Time Dances of South Liven Up the Gray Heroes Gathered at Camp Johnston,’ *Atlanta Constitution*, 8 October 1919, 10. Union veterans did occasionally perform at fiddle contests: e.g. ‘Billy Powell Of Boone Wins Fiddle Contest’, Des Moines Register [Iowa], 30 August 1926, 5. However, there appears to have been a special connection between Confederate veterans and fiddle contests: Goertzen, *Southern Fiddlers and Fiddle Contests*, 1-10; Wolfe, *The Devil’s Box*, 3-12.

the integration of veteran culture into fiddlers' contests, and vice versa, embedded the musical event within a wider Confederate tradition. An 18-year-old Confederate soldier who served in the last year of the Civil War, if they survived past their relatively low life expectancy, would be in his eighties by the 1930s, meaning these decades were the last opportunity to honour the last generation of servicemen from such an era-defining conflict.

Organisations that promoted the Confederate tradition, such as the United Confederate Veterans (UCV), the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC), the Sons of Veterans, the Southern Memorial Association, and other smaller institutions, sponsored and organised old fiddlers' contests. As fundraisers, contests served as a rudimentary form of social welfare for poor aged veterans. The absence of federal support and typically relatively low levels of state funding meant that many aged Confederate veterans faced poverty.[45] These organisations felt duty-bound to aid the ageing, often destitute and disabled 'heroic generation' by filling the funding gap through the popular entertainment model of old fiddlers' contests. In a Parker County, Georgia contest in 1912, and another in Atlanta in 1917, profits went to veterans who could not afford to travel to the state reunion.[46] A prize was awarded at a 1900 Texan contest for any 'fiddler who lost a limb in the Civil War,' while a 1930 Mississippi contest was noted by the national press for its star fiddler: a blind Confederate veteran.[47] Contests also provided informal kinds of work for disabled veterans. The master of ceremonies for one Georgia contest was the one-armed Colonel A. V. Poole.[48] Other contests were organised with proceeds contributing towards the general expenses of veterans' groups, homes, or reunions.[49]

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[45] Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), 140-147.
[46] Tom H. Bell, 'Confederate Veterans Entertain,' *Weekly Herald* [Weatherford, TX], 11 April 1912, 3; 'Fund For Reunion Is Nearing Goal,' *Atlanta Constitution*, 21 August 1919, 1.
[47] Lowry, 'All Sorts of Fiddlers,' 4; 'Confederates Open Sessions At Biloxi,' *Washington Post*, June 3, 1930, 11.
[48] *Fiddlin' Georgia Crazy*, 48.
[49] 'Fiddlers' Convention at Bijou Draws Crowd,' *Atlanta Constitution*, 28 January 1915, 10; 'Fiddlers' Convention Will Open Tonight,' *Atlanta Constitution*, 10 April 1917, 7. For less than an evening's work, contest prizes could be relatively substantial, sometimes between ten to forty dollars: Wolfe, *The Devil's Box*, 206.

As well as fundraising, groups like the UCV and UDC saw that contests featuring Confederate veterans could serve a social function by entertaining ex-servicemen. A group of veterans was invited as special guest audience members to a 1929 Georgia contest.[50] Fiddlin' John Carson performed at UDC-sponsored events within veteran homes.[51] Confederate veterans also fiddled for the entertainment of old civilians.[52] Sometimes the case was made that veterans were inherently more accomplished players of 'old-time' southern music than civilians. The *Atlanta Constitution* explained that the competitors of a 1919 contest in Georgia were mostly veterans because 'These men are choice players of that old-fashioned music, which has ever had a charm for the people of the South.'[53]

Occasionally, 'reconciliatory' contests brought together aged Confederate and Union veterans, such as a 1917 event in Chicago.[54] Such contests were part of a broader series of events in the early twentieth century that brought together veterans from North and South in order to bring the nation together. A commemoration of the Battle of Gettysburg in 1913, for example, drew hundreds of veterans from both sides of the Mason-Dixon line. The frailty of the ex-soldiers from both armies prompted reflection on the sacrifices made by

[50] 'Georgia Fiddlers Gather To Fight for 1929 Title,' *Atlanta Constitution,* 28 September 1929, 6.
[51] Wiggins, *Fiddlin' Georgia Crazy*, 136; 'Aged Veterans Of Sixties Hold Annual Reunion,' *Atlanta Constitution,* 16 July 1921, 2. The fiddle contest was one of the most common musical entertainments provided explicitly for aged Confederate veterans, but it was not the only one. In 1895, the 80-year-old minstrel performer and composer of 'Dixie', Dan Emmett performed for a group of ageing Confederate veterans in Washington, D.C. The concert was also for the benefit of Emmett who by then was described in the press as old' and 'destitute': 'The Author of Dixie', *Washington Post*, 3 February 1895, 17.
[52] In Atlanta in 1893, aged Confederate veterans entertained an aged audience during the fiddle contest segment of a barbecue for 'old-timers': 'With Colonel Adair: That Genial Spirit Issues A Call To The Oldtimers,' *Atlanta Constitution,* 22 September 1893, 5.
[53] 'Fund For Reunion Is Nearing Goal', *Atlanta Constitution,* 21 August 1919, 1.
[54] 'North And South Fiddlers To Meet,' *Washington Post*, 28 March 1917, 9. Aside from Chicago, Washington. D.C. was an obvious venue for 'reconciliatory' old fiddlers' contests that 'reunited' Confederate and Union veterans, but similar events happened elsewhere in the country, such as Weatherford, Texas: 'G.A.R. Week at Washington Theaters,' *Washington Post*, 26 September 1915, 2 'Old Fiddlers' Reunion,' *Daily Herald* [Weatherford, TX], 7 September 1912, 1.

previous generations, and their shared advanced ages more generally signalled how the nation had 'moved on' from its sectional divisions.[55]

However, as Charles Reagan Wilson argues, some southern veterans and citizens were ambivalent about 'reunions' between the two armies.[56] Some of the more competitive Confederate veterans continued to proudly revive sectional tensions, thereby bolstering the Lost Cause tradition from within an environment of supposed national reconciliation. Discussing the upcoming Chicago contest in 1917, Henry C. Gilliland, a Confederate veteran and president of the Old Fiddlers Association of Texas, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Arkansas, predicted to journalists that the 'only thing that will prevent the contest from taking place will be the failure of the old soldier fiddlers of the North to call the challenge'.[57] The age of Gilliland and his competitors made such threats appear playful, yet such comments helped instil in southern audiences a small degree of pride in the South. Their age also was directly connected to their authenticity: the *Chicago Tribune* reported on one interregional contest that 'when the old soldier [and fiddler] came on there was no hesitancy on the part of the audience in receiving them … They were real and they looked it. They had long gray whiskers.'[58]

For many contemporaries, the disproportionate engagement and deaths of southerners in the Spanish-American War and First World War vindicated ideas of southern heroism and patriotism, and were vital steps towards national reconciliation.[59] That fiddlers'

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[55] For the Gettysburg reunion and other public events aimed at national reconciliation, see Caroline E. Janney, *Remembering the Civil War: Reunion and the Limits of Reconciliation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South, 1865-1913* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 68. There are parallels between these kinds of interregional fiddle contests and similarly 'reconciliatory' baseball games in the late nineteenth century: George B. Kirsch, *Baseball in Blue and Gray: The National Pastime during the Civil War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 133-134.
[56] Wilson, *Baptized in Blood*, 133-161.
[57] 'North And South Fiddlers To Meet', *Washington Post*, 28 March 1917, 9.
[58] Richard Henry Little, 'Round About Chicago', *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 2 August 1910, 8.
[59] For the South and national reconciliation following Reconstruction, see Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of

contests in the South often featured aged Confederate veterans alongside younger veterans from subsequent wars suggests, paradoxically, that an intergenerational thread tied the Confederate tradition to this process of reconciliation. At an 1898 contest, young veterans of the 'Spanish War' and aged veterans of the Civil War were joined together in front of an 'enthusiastic audience'.[60] Similarly, a 1932 fiddle convention in Watauga, North Carolina was sponsored by the American Legion, an organisation established by and for First World War veterans.[61] As Gaines Foster argues, the mingling of aged Confederate veterans with younger veterans publicly affirmed that the spirit of the Confederacy lived on. The possibilities of intergenerational interactions at contests made them an important venue for reinforcing a sense of military patriotism and pride in southern heritage.[62]

Fiddlers' contest produced a uniquely 'southern' effect on aged Confederate veterans: the idiosyncratic sound of the 'rebel yell'. As early as 1898, the *Atlanta Constitution* reported that an old fiddler at a contest in Atlanta performed 'Dixie' which 'always bring forth the rebel yell' from veteran audiences.[63] A 1908 Charlotte, North Carolina, contest induced 'wild rebel yells from the Confederate veterans'. Later, a 1921

North Carolina Press, 1993); David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory*, Second Edition (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2002); Edward J. Blum, *Reforging the White Republic* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007); However, national reconciliation was not uniformly agreed upon in the South. Michael O'Brien has demonstrated the complex feelings of a selection of southern intellectuals towards the First World War and its meanings for the South: Michael O'Brien, *The Idea of the American South, 1920-1941* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990). Similarly, David C. Turpie has noted how many white southern men held no stake in the Spanish-American War, and did not view it as a symbol of national reconciliation: David C. Turpie, 'A Voluntary War: The Spanish-American War, White Southern Manhood, and the Struggle to Recruit Volunteers in the South,' *Journal of Southern History* 80, no. 4 (November 1, 2014): 859-892.

[60] 'Some Flashlights On Veterans Caught In War And In Peace', *Atlanta Constitution*, 21 July 1898, 4.

[61] 'Fiddlers Will Enter Contests,' *Watauga Democrat* [Boone, NC], 23 June 1932, 1; The *Constitution* also ran an article in 1918 imploring First World War soldiers to learn the rebel yell from the aged Civil War veterans' to win the war: Telamon Cuyler, 'Old 'Rebel Yell' Now Carries Terror to Huns,' *Atlanta Constitution*, 6 October 1918, 17.

[62] Foster suggests many Confederate veterans, and southerners in general, were caught up in the patriotism of the both the First World War and Spanish-American War: Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy*, 146.

[63] 'Some Flashlights On Veterans Caught In War And In Peace,' *Atlanta Constitution*, 21 July 1898, 4.

contest in Chattanooga, Tennessee, sent veterans 'wild when the fiddlers started the musical program with 'Dixie', the rebel yell resounding throughout the tabernacle.'[64] Although it was relatively predictable that a reunited group of old Confederate veterans might burst out in rebel yells, such incidences were useful for and appealing to those sympathetic to Lost Cause ideology. Hearing an 'authentic' sound of the Confederacy 'proved' that the enduring virile spirit of the Old South lived on, even if it only survived in the worn vessel of an aged veteran.[65]

As well as rebel cries, fiddlers' contests also elicited reminiscences from veterans in attendance in order to promote, and hopefully, strengthen, the Confederate tradition. The *Atlanta Constitution* explained the emotional impact the veteran Henry C. Gilliland had on his peers during a 1922 contest:

> [Gilliland] inspired happiness for the older veterans. The veterans were all in high spirits despite the weariness attendant on a long train ride. Their eyes sparkled with youth and pep and their gray hairs seemed to burden them not at all.[66]

Recent medical research suggests that aged veterans might well have enjoyed contests because the cognitive connections between music, memory, and joy are intensified with age.[67] Significantly, this perception that reminiscence had a *positive* psychological effect on

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[64] 'Fiddlers Had A Convention', *Washington Post*, 26 January 1908, 2; 'Alf Taylor Welcomes Vets At Chattanooga: Lauds South's Part in the World War', *Atlanta Constitution*, 26 October 1921, 1.

[65] To some degree the exhibition of rebel-crying veterans shared some of the exploitative fascination that characterised 'freakshows' of the late-nineteenth century, not least those based around elderly ex-slaves with biblical ages, although the agency of these figures differed sharply from their white veteran equivalents: Louise Chude-Sokei, 'The Uncanny History of Minstrels and Machines', in *Burnt Cork: Traditions and Legacies of Blackface Minstrelsy*, ed. Stephen Johnson (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), 104-132. R. B. Rosenburg, *Living Monuments: Confederate Soldiers' Homes in the New South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 107-110.

[66] Stewart Gelders, 'Surviving Private Of Confederacy Goes to Reunion', *Atlanta Constitution*, 19 June 1922, 1.

[67] Reminiscence therapy involving music is now practiced by health professionals, psychologists, and gerontologists: Bob Woods et al., 'Reminiscence Therapy For Dementia,' *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*, no. 2 (April 20, 2005): 2; Yen-Chun Lin, Yu-Tzu Dai and Shiow-Li Hwang, 'The Effect of Reminiscence on the Elderly Population: A

the aged was contrary to the popular and academic consensus of the time that pathologised nostalgia as a psychiatric disorder, one that the elderly were seen as being particularly susceptible towards.[68]

Contests were also seen as inspirational spaces for non-veteran elderly southerners to reminisce about, and thereby preserve, an older, 'simpler', agrarian South. At a 1908 Charlotte contest, one journalist saw the 'happy smiles of reminiscence gleaming in [the aged audience's] half-closed eyes' as the fiddlers played.[69] One journalist wrote that the aged fiddlers gave young audiences at a 1922 contest 'a vision of the time when the old fiddlers, too, were young.'[70] The imagined past was purposefully vague enough to appeal to an array of southerners: a 1917 contest in Jacksboro, Texas, and an interregional contest in Chicago in 1910, gave audiences a metaphorical journey into the 'memories of other times and other days' and 'the most wonderful country in the world, the Land of Long Ago.'[71] In 1900, the *Houston Daily Post* published a poem in honour of a 74-year-old contest:

> Backward, turn backward, oh, Time in your flight,
> And make me young again, just for tonight,
> Fiddlers, come back from the echoless shore,

Systematic Review,' *Public Health Nursing* 20, no. 4 (August 2003): 297-306; Susan Thornton and Janet Brotchie, 'Reminiscence: A Critical Review of the Empirical Literature,' *British Journal of Clinical Psychology* 26, no. 2 (May 1, 1987): 93-111.

[68] The emotional benefits of remembering through music were not recognised by academics until the 1960s. For a history of nostalgia as psychiatric disorder, and the place of ageing within that scientific framework, see Constantine Sedikides et al., 'Nostalgia: Past, Present, and Future', *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 17, no. 5 (1 October 2008): 304-307; R. N. Butler, 'The Life Review: An Interpretation of Reminiscence in the Aged', *Psychiatry* 26 (February 1963): 65-76; Bob Woods et al., 'Reminiscence Therapy For Dementia', *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*, no. 2 (20 April 2005): 2.

[69] 'Fiddlers Had A Convention', *Washington Post*, 26 January 1908, 2. Similarly, a review for a South Carolina contest in 1909 noted that the music 'awakened memories of happy by-gone days' in the aged audience. A 1905 contest in West Virginia brought back 'fond recollections of the past to the old, and makes them feel good again': 'The Fiddle And The Bow', *Herald And News* [Newberry, SC], 23 March 1909, 8; 'Fiddlers' Contest', *Fairmont West Virginian*, 11 May 1905, 8.

[70] Charles W. Ingram, 'Old Fiddlers in Contest at Lufkin Play Breakdowns', *Temple Daily Telegram* [TX], 31 March 1922, 3.

[71] 'Old Fiddler's Contest', *Jacksboro Gazette* [TX], 24 May 1917, 7; Richard Henry Little, 'Round About Chicago', *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 2 August 1910, 8. Similarly, a contest in York, South Carolina, in 1910 was praised for its 'tuneful melodies of the long ago': 'Fiddlers Hold Convention', *Cheraw Chronicle* [SC], 20 April 1922, 2. Audiences to a Dallas, Texas, contest in 1900 could expect to 'hear the yesterday' in the music of the old fiddlers: 'Old Fiddlers Convention', *Johnson City Comet* [TN], 10 May 1900, 1.

And play the old tunes again, just as of yore.[72]

Aged contestants repeated this message. Uncle Eb Garston regretfully told a journalist at a 1927 Atlanta convention that 'the good old tunes are passing away'.[73] Considering these nostalgic sentiments came from elderly fiddlers and audiences, it is notable that such longings revolved around childhood. The *Herald News* reported in 1909 that a fiddler at a contest in Newberry, South Carolina, performed their song 'as only one can render it who has loved the notes of this sweet-throated songster from his childhood days.'[74]

Particular historical circumstances intensified what these memories meant at fiddle contests. The First World War, for example, provided a strong impetus for nostalgia in the South, as it had for the Ford contests. The *Democrat Voice* in Lufkin, Texas, opined in 1921 that the organisation of an old fiddlers' contest would bring back a sense of older times, and comfort the local population that 'Things are gradually beating back to normalcy'.[75] As Jeanette Keith shows, Texas and the South generally produced disproportionate numbers of both soldiers and draft-dodgers during the War.[76] The figure of the old fiddler who harked back to 'simpler' times held an obvious appeal as a return to 'normalcy' in the aftermath of war.

Some sub-regions of the South venerated different contingents of aged southerners at fiddlers' contests. In Texas, for example, elderly 'settlers', 'pioneers', or 'frontiersmen' were often performers or attendees at contests. Fiddlers' contests were fixtures of cowboy

[72] This poem was a parody of *Rock Me to Sleep*, written by Elizabeth Akers Allen in 1859, but with the object of prose changed from a deceased mother to an old fiddler: 'Old Fiddlers Contest', *Houston Daily Post*, 11 February 1900, 8.
[73] 'Gid Tanner, Famous Georgia Fiddler, Wins New Laurels', *Atlanta Constitution*, 16 November 1927, 2.
[74] 'The Fiddle And The Bow', *Herald And News* [Newberry, SC], 23 March 1909, 8.
[75] 'Editorial,' *Coleman Democrat-Voice* [TX], 2 December 1921, 2;
[76] Jeanette Keith, *Rich Man's War, Poor Man's Fight: Race, Class, and Power in the Rural South during the First World War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 1-6, 111-132;

and rodeo reunions.[77] A 1900 fiddle contest was organised to raise a monument and build graves for settlers in Honey Grove, Texas, as well as entertain the town's aged frontiersmen.[78] When an old pioneer called 'Uncle' Bud Barron won a 1937 fiddle contest in Paducah, Texas, the *Paducah Post* used his win as a springboard to discuss how the town had changed since early years in the region.[79] Likewise, reporting on a 1900 contest in Dallas, the *Comet* described how for 'white-haired men who have fought the battles of existence long years ago … the floodgates of memory were opened and a tide of dear recollections came rushing in.'[80] As with the Lost Cause ideology that underpinned Confederate veteran-orientated fiddlers' contests, Texans used the events to valorise the supposed sacrifice and heroism of white frontiersmen. Public veneration of older 'veterans' of the West who had 'opened up' the frontier for subsequent generations fed into commonly-held perceptions at the turn of the twentieth century of the end of frontier culture, most succinctly captured by historian Frederick Jackson Turner's 'frontier thesis'. Beneath these anxieties lay a litany of racial fears about indigenous groups and Mexicans, culminating most violently in the South Texas race war of 1915.[81] If such contexts made Texas contests different to those in a state like North Carolina, that there still was tangible crossover between Confederate veteran and settler veneration at Texan fiddlers' contests re-tethers them to the wider southern phenomenon. Reporting on a 1917 Jacksboro contest, the local

[77] O. C. Harrison, 'Stage Set for Big Rodeo-Reunion On Thurs., Fri., Sat.', *Baylor County Banner* [Seymour, TX], 19 July 1945, 1; O. C. Harrison, 'Welcome Old Timers, Sponsors, Contestants and Visitors', *Baylor County Banner*, 19 July 1945, 6.
[78] J. H. Lowry, 'All Sorts of Fiddlers', *Honey Grove Signal* [TX], 16 February 1900, 4.
[79] E. A. Carlock, 'Wins Fiddle Contest: 'Uncle' Bud Barron,' *Paducah Post* [TX], 20 May 1937, 3.
[80] 'Old Fiddlers Convention', *Johnson City Comet* [TN], 10 May 1900, 1.
[81] Frederick J. Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: H. Holt and Company, 1920). For some of the racial contexts in Texas during this period, see Cynthia E. Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed: The Rise of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 28; Jason McDonald, *Racial Dynamics in Early Twentieth-Century Austin, Texas* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2012).

press praised the fact that it was aged Confederate veterans who performed for the aged settlers, because veterans had 'many warm friends among the old settlers'.[82]

Old fiddlers' contests, then, were sites of 'collective memory-making'. An important remembered or imagined locale at such events was the mythologised 'barn dance', a key place in the US rural imaginary, and one commonly associated with the South.[83] One aged southerner told the *Chicago Daily Tribune* at an interregional contest in Chicago in 1910:

> It brings it all back. I can see the old barn with all the boys and girls standing around and the horses and the cows looking in wide-eyed astonishment … and everybody's happy and life is worthwhile and the world's a wonderful place. And I can see her plain. She's got that little gingham dress on and holding her sunbonnet in one hand, and she looks just like she did years and years ago.[84]

If the Populists, farmer alliances, and those they influenced in the early twentieth century were the political and economic responses to the real trials of southern farmers - confronting intermittent crop failures, price flctuations, mass migration, and what was seen as the predations of northern capital and corporations in southern affairs - the popularity of old southerners at fiddle contests recalling barn dances of the past was a cultural manifestation of the same apprehensions.[85] Embedded in this nostalgia for a rural past were also fears about changing gender roles. It is significant that the old southerner at the Chicago contest described an attractive young woman in old-fashioned southern attire. Recalling how women

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[82] 'Old Fiddler's Contest', *Jacksboro Gazette* [TX], 24 May 1917, 7. For a similar meeting of veterans and settlers, see J. H. Lowry, 'All Sorts of Fiddlers', *Honey Grove Signal* [TX], 16 February 1900, 4.

[83] For a thorough examination of 'collective memory-making', see Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 1-16.

[84] Richard Henry Little, 'Round About Chicago,' *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 2 August 1910, 8.

[85] The agrarian movement in the US can be traced back to Jeffersonians thought, though such sentiments took hold amongst intellectuals in the South during Reconstruction. The concerns of farmers and the organisation of farmers continued and intensified, particularly as prices fell in the 1890s, and the effects of urbanisation, migration and industrialisation became more acute at the turn of the twentieth century. This intellectual tradition finally reached its denouement with *I'll Take My Stand*, a symposium and collection of essays in 1930: Twelve Southerners, *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (New York and London: Harper, 1930); Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South*, 187-248.

used to look, and, by association, *behave*, was a simple way to critique a modern era in which women increasingly challenged the norms of female appearance and behaviour. The *Washington Post* reported that at a 1908 contest in Charlotte, North Carolina audiences heard

> quaint old melodies that caused white-haired members of the audience to get out their red bandanna handkerchiefs as freshly awakened memories carried their thoughts back to the break-downs and corn-shucking festivals of their young manhood days when country lad and lass gathered from many a mile around to shake a foot on rough clapboard floors.[86]

Revealingly, both these reports juxtaposed the remembered virile physicality and sexuality of young manhood with the white-haired, weeping men doing the remembering.

Virility and Debility

The same *Washington Post* article also wrote of the revitalising power of old-time music: 'infectious jigs got into [the old men's] blood and reminded them of merry times of long ago … [they] could not restrain themselves from "calling the figgers".'[87] It was frequently claimed that fiddlers' contests revitalised otherwise debilitated older attendees and performers, making them virile or 'young' again. An advertisement for a Tennessee contest in 1921 promised prospective older attendees that the fiddlers would 'render some of the old-time tunes that make you call back forty years and make the bottom of our feet tingle.'[88] In a 1907 cartoon that illustrated a humorous *Atlanta Constitution* column about rural Georgia, an elderly man with thick glasses and long white beard walks determinedly to a fiddlers' convention [Appendix 1.1]. The image is captioned with the dialogue of two rural characters:

> How's the old man gettin' along now?

[86] 'Fiddlers Had A Convention', *Washington Post*, 26 January 1908, 2.
[87] Ibid.
[88] 'Carroll County Fair: Bigger And Better Than Ever,' *Carroll County Democrat* [Huntingdon, TN], 7 October 1921, 1.

> Well, he's feelin' his age somewhat bein' clost on to 90, but last week he walked 20 miles to a fiddlers' convention an' we hain't hearn him complain no sence [sic].[89]

Another cartoon, appended to a 1927 *Constitution* article about the forthcoming Georgia Old Fiddlers' Convention, shows an old fiddler with white beard and glasses in a 'whirlwind' of fiddling [Appendix 1.2]. Air marks encircle the space around the fiddler's body, indicating that he is in motion. With one leg in the air, the tail of his jacket flailing behind, and his hat flying off his head, the fictional fiddler reflects all the common tropes of mountain musicians as thrillingly wild and even animalistic. His body and his personal accruements are victim to the 'uncontrollable' force of old-time music.[90]

While cartoons could visually display images of virile elderly fiddlers, photographs of old fiddlers in the press presented stern, grizzled old men who looked their age. In 1919, an Oklahoman newspaper published a full-page spread of photographs of Uncle Billy Porterdale from the Georgia Old Fiddlers' Convention. The tagline indicated that Porterdale was '83 years young and still doing the buck and wing as well as any youngster'. Whether it was the editor's intention or not, the photographs of Porterdale and the other veterans, with their balding or grey-haired heads and long beards, hardly reflected such a description.[91]

The humour of these visual depictions of fiddlers' contests was based on a simple incongruity: it was funny to see or imagine an old man being uncharacteristically physical or virile. The framing of fiddlers' contests as sporting events added to this incongruity. The

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[89] 'Just From Georgia,' *Atlanta Constitution*, 5 April 1907, 6.
[90] 'New Aspirants To Renown Will Seek Fiddler's Crown', *Atlanta Constitution*, 13 November 1927, 8.
[91] 'Pictorial News from Round the World,' *Daily Oklahoman*, 30 March 1919, reprinted in Russell, *Country Music Originals*, 33. This trope of the physically vigorous old fiddler was found outside the South. A cartoon published in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* in 1910 depicts an interregional fiddle contest between several old veterans, each with 'gesture lines' in the air around them to indicate their movement: Richard Henry Little, 'Round About Chicago', *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 2 August 1910, 8. Similarly, a cartoon featured in the *Des Moines Register* features Henry Ford dancing rapturously to a gang of white-bearded, balding and ebullient fiddlers. An equally elderly 'Pa and Ma' sit beside him in gleeful, animated applause. Significantly, an unimpressed young audience standing beside a jazz orchestra can be seen in the background: 'Oh Fiddlesticks', *Des Moines Register* [Des Moines, IA], 13 January 1926, 1.

macho 'fight talk' found in sports culture was used comically at fiddlers' contests in reference to aged competitors. In Texas, one fan of the Smith County Fiddlers' Association claimed the old fiddlers could run 'rings around' those from Gregg County Fiddlers' Association 'in more ways than a farmer can whip a mule.'[92] Many elderly fiddlers wielded humorous physical threats while representing their home states. In 1916, L. H. Hill, a veteran from Germanton, North Carolina, wrote in *Confederate Veteran* magazine in advance of a Birmingham, Alabama veterans' reunion that fiddlers should come 'prepared to do your best, and then if you don't mind these old Tarheels will … put "the tar on you."'[93] While the press depicted such competitiveness with a humorous slant, some older fiddlers sincerely viewed contests as spaces to reinforce their artistic pride, self-respect, and the honour of their region. For example, Texan fiddler Henry C. Gilliland wrote a letter to a newspaper to publicly dispute another aged fiddler's claim to the regional championship title, which he saw as a genuine slight on his character and on the fiddle contest tradition.[94]

When describing fiddlers' contests, the media stressed the profound effect the music had on the worn bodies of older contestants by using a vocabulary of physical and spiritual rejuvenation similar to that used by the pseudo-religious wing of Lost Cause advocates.[95] It also borrowed a language employed by contemporaneous cosmetic and pharmaceutical marketing campaigns for anti-ageing products, and a growing literature of medical and lifestyle advice manuals that revealed how to 'stay young'.[96] Aged contestants at contests in Dallas, Texas in 1900 and Macon, Georgia in 1912, for example were described respectively as 'pretty feeble, but … full of the rich melodies of youthful vigor' and 'bent with age, although young in spirit.'[97] A review of a contest in Charlotte, North Carolina in 1908

[92] Henry Edwards, 'Old Fiddlers Of County Organize An Association', *Tyler Journal* [TX], 13 May 1927, 1.
[93] 'Old Fiddlers' Contest During Reunion', *Confederate Veteran*, February 1916, 93.
[94] 'Claims Championship,' *Daily Herald* [Weatherford, TX], 28 August 1912, 1.
[95] A sense of renewal or 'resurrection' was a central tenet of what Charles Reagan Wilson calls the 'religion of the lost cause': Wilson, *Baptized in Blood*, 1.
[96] For an extensive analysis of anti-ageing products and 'advice to the old' Haber and Gratton, *Old Age and the Search for Security*, 143-171.
[97] 'Old Fiddlers Convention', *Johnson City Comet* [TN], 10 May 1900, 1; Tom H. Bell, 'Confederate Veterans Entertain', *Weekly Herald* [Weatherford, TX], 4 November 1912, 3.

described how '[the fiddlers were] past the prime of life, but, judging by the vim and vigor with which they drove their bows up and down across the catgut, the sap of youth was still strong in their rugged old ones.'[98]

Fiddle music revitalised older audiences too. One 'crippled' old audience member of the same Charlotte contest had 'not danced the reel for a long time' but 'indulged to his heart's content' once the fiddlers played. Likewise, an old audience member of the 1924 Atlanta contest danced up and down the aisles, and, according to the *Atlanta Constitution*, was the 'niftiest stepper in the crowd'.[99] One contest's judge responded physically to the fiddling, even though he had

> lost the slimness of youth and in peaceful dignity of middle age has acquired a rotundity of form that militates against any superfluous activity … [He] twisted and fidgeted in his chair and tried in vain to keep his feet still … He threw dignity, pose and sobriety of conduct to the winds and suddenly bouncing from his chair behind the row of fiddlers he leaped to his feet.[100]

Evidently, even those considered 'middle-aged' could be physically rejuvenated or 'de-aged' by old-time music.[101]

The case can certainly be made that depictions of old, debilitated fiddlers and Confederate veterans as remarkably virile, especially at contests organised by groups like the UDC, presented them as wishful personifications of the old, but stubbornly persistent Confederate spirit. Yet, such representations were not limited to southern fiddlers. Local press praised a 92-year-old fiddler from Guthrie, Oklahoma in 1914 for playing 'the old tunes with a vim and enthusiasm that would convince any psychologist that neither mental

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[98] 'Fiddlers Had A Convention', *Washington Post*, 26 January 1908, 2.
[99] 'Rivalry Reaches Fever Heat At Old Fiddlers' Convention', *Atlanta Constitution*, 8 November 1924, 22.
[100] 'Fiddlers Had A Convention', *Washington Post*, 26 January 1908, 2.
[101] The concept of being 'de-aged by culture' builds on the work of Margaret Gullette, *Aged By Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

nor physical skill need become impaired in old age.'[102] Nevertheless, this vexed image particularly suited old southerners because it was the Confederacy that lost the war, and many believed the values associated with the Old South were 'decaying' like the bodies of the aged veterans who had fought to defend them. The trope of virile aged Confederate veterans went beyond fiddlers' contests and into the wider Lost Cause culture. In 1922, the southern press was taken aback by the heroic efforts of an 83-year-old Confederate veteran who intended to walk 600 miles from Atlanta to Richmond, North Carolina to attend a veterans' reunion. The South Carolina *Yorkville Enquirer* printed a photograph of the balding and white-bearded veteran proudly tipping his hat, and explained that 'despite his advanced age, he feels that he will have little difficult in making the trip.'[103] The seemingly supernatural strength of veterans at fiddlers' contests and beyond reflected hopes that the Old South and its values, if old and limping through a modern US, would retain its essential power.

Clearly, some media outlets praised contests for helping 'revitalise' the aged, and, hopefully, the old-fashioned values they represented. However, some portions of the media and the middle-class punters of the bigger contests occasionally paid attention to fiddlers' contests in order to laugh at, belittle, and thereby differentiate themselves from the ramshackle gathering of 'hillbillies' onstage and in the crowds. In this respect, the crux of the humour in many of the above reports about old-fashioned, elderly southerners with seemingly 'uncontrollable' bodies may superficially have related to the inappropriate behaviour it induced in the aged. Yet underneath such depictions lay veiled commentaries on class difference in an increasingly class-conscious New South.[104] As well as reflecting these

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[102] Oklahoma's old fiddlers' contests were intimately tied up with the southern contests, particularly due to Henry Gilliland's Old Time Fiddlers Association of Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico and Arkansas, which organised contests between the states: 'Old Time Fiddlers' Contest,' *Guthrie Daily Leader* [OK], 19 December 1914, 1.
[103] 'Will Walk 600 Miles To Confederate Reunion,' *Yorkville Enquirer* [SC], 30 May 1922, 6.
[104] For this class-based interpretation of the comedic value of the Atlanta contests, see Goodson, *Highbrows, Hillbillies, and Hellfire,*161-183; Campbell, *Music and the Making of a New South,* 109-112.

internal tensions in the South, the fact that national newspapers such as the *Washington Post* also reported on 'virile' aged southerners in this humorous way implies that a longstanding sense of superiority in the North concerning notions of 'southern difference' also underpinned what ostensibly were comedic stories based on ideas of age appropriateness.[105]

The virility of the old fiddlers also figured into the competitive dimension of the contests. During this period, more and more elderly men joined sports clubs as a response to a crisis of masculinity created in part by the growth of the idea of retirement. In this context, fiddlers' contests arguably were an alternative route for older men, particularly those with disabilities or ailments that inhibited their playing of more physical sports, to reclaim their manliness.[106] The common use of the adjective 'grizzled', a term that implies a sense of rustic, tough manhood, but also wornness and life experience, to describe aged fiddlers illustrates that a distinct lexicon was required in order for them to reclaim a semblance of manhood on the contest stage.

The sports-like 'rejuvenating' quality associated with old fiddlers' contests also situates them within the wider 'muscular Christianity' movement during this period, in which men embraced competitive, violent, sports in response to the supposed 'feminisation' of men and Protestantism in the modern era. Southern churches and religious organisations often organised fiddlers' contests as fundraisers, even though, as Charles Wolfe shows, many religious southerners believed that the fiddle was the 'Devil's box'.[107] For church

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[105] For this longstanding notion of 'southern difference' in the national imagination, see Cox, *Dreaming of Dixie*, 1-9.

[106] Wood, *Retiring Men*, 8-19; Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003), 1-6;

[107] In Alabama, the Baptist Ladies of Jackson and the Baptist Young People of Holt were organisers and beneficiaries of fiddle contests. An Alabama Convention helped to fund the repairs of Church property in Fort Payne. The Christian Woman's Board of Missions in Mount Sterling, Kentucky, organised a contest in 1900: Joyce H. Cauthen, *With Fiddle & Well-Rosined Bow: Old Time Fiddling In Alabama* (Tuscaloosa: University Alabama Press, 2001), 190, 212; 'Old Time Fiddlers' Contest', *Guthrie Daily Leader* [OK], 19 December 1914; 'Old Time Fiddler's Contest', *Mt. Sterling Advocate* [Mount Sterling, KY], 4 December 1900, 4. Many fiddle contests, such as the Atlanta convention banned religious

leaders, however, a sense of Christian filial piety, and the funds contests could raise, seemingly trumped religious reservations about the wicked nature of the fiddle. Curiously, muscular Christianity, initially at least, was more of a northern phenomenon. It was not until the 1930s that southern churches reversed their previous animosity towards sports. [108] Reconsidering old fiddlers' contests as a pseudo-sport therefore nuances the history of the muscular Christianity movement in the South.

Though the cultural associations surrounding old age helped many aged fiddlers and audiences take centre stage at fiddle contests, the social and medical dimensions of ageing were obstacles for others. One fiddlers' association in Brenham, Texas reported in 1900 that its efforts were stymied by the deaths of its elderly members.[109] In 1923, Texan veteran Henry C. Gilliland could not compete in a competition he himself had organised for the Jackson County Fair in Oklahoma because rheumatism had struck his middle finger.[110] Rural isolation, particularly for those living in mountainous Appalachia, also particularly disadvantaged older musicians, as they were less likely to embrace the newer communication and transportation technologies that enabled younger mountain musicians to compete in contests.[111] Prof. C. Z. Whitaker, the head of a small North Carolina fiddlers' association, wrote to several Piedmont newspapers in search of old fiddlers to become members, but received few replies.[112] In 1928, the Smith County Fiddlers' Association in Texas blamed rural isolation and communication breakdown as regular issues in enrolling

songs from fiddle contests: *Atlanta Journal*, 22 November 1920, 9. Significantly, Fiddlin' John Carson's descendants recalled a contest in which an elderly performer was allowed a rare exception to the rule: Wiggins, *Fiddlin' Georgia Crazy*, 59. For the commonly-held notion of the fiddle as sinful instrument, see: Wolfe, *The Devil's Box*, xv.

[108] For the complex history of muscular Christianity in the South, see William J. Baker, *Playing with God: Religion and Modern Sport* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 85-107.

[109] John G. Rankin, 'Old Time Ball - Fiddlers Contest', *Brenham Daily Banner* [TX], 26 May 1900, 1.

[110] 'Fiddle Contest', *Jackson County Tribune* [Duke, OK], 30 August 1923, 1.

[111] This issue was clearly more relevant to the elderly in the more isolated Appalachian Mountains, a challenge which has persisted into the more recent past: Graham D. Rowles, 'Changing Health Culture in Rural Appalachia: Implications for Serving the Elderly,' *Journal of Aging Studies* 5, no. 4 (December 1, 1991): 375-389.

[112] 'Fiddlers' Convention,' *Danbury Reporter* [NC], 10 October 1907, 1.

and maintaining older members.[113] Although the gradual advent of railways and roads opened up the rural South, and facilitated the growth of fiddle contest culture, some older fiddlers still struggled to get to fiddle contests because they were uncomfortable riding the bumpy rails.[114] On top of this, older fiddlers were more susceptible to illness. In 1917, two contestants from a troupe of Confederate veterans fell ill and dropped out of a contest in Jacksboro, Texas, just days before it began.[115]

Further difficulties arose for those old fiddlers who managed to arrive to the contests. One journalist noted that the footlights of a venue had to be turned off because the fiddlers' eyes were 'old and dim and couldn't stand the glare.'[116] Homer Sherill, who had fiddled at contests in the 1930s as a young man, recalled that they were typically held in packed, unventilated barns, court houses and town halls that were so hot that he struggled to breathe while onstage. If the 20-year-old Sherill found the heat oppressive, it is astonishing that so many octogenarian fiddlers endured so many summer contests.[117] Confederate veterans with disabilities also faced difficulties. At the previously mentioned Branham, Texas contest in 1900, fiddler R. Phares performed despite having lost his right arm from a gunshot wound at the Battle of Mansfield. Ingeniously, Phares fastened the bow beneath his right leg used 'the fiddle like other performers do the bow'. An outpouring of charity soon followed his performance:

> some big-hearted individual in the gallery threw a dollar at him, and this was the signal for a downpour of coins, such as probably never overtook

[113] Henry Edwards, 'Old Fiddlers Notice,' *Tyler Journal* [TX], 10 February 1928, 6.
[114] Many aged attendees of a 1922 contest in Georgia struggled with the 'weariness attendant on a long train ride.' In 1917, the aged patriarch of the fiddling Smith family Georgia was wary about riding the rails to the state's fiddling convention: 'The old man never was more'n twenty miles from home before, and the boys say they had a hard time gettin' him onto the railroad train. But he sure can fiddle': Stewart Gelders, 'Surviving Private Of Confederacy Goes to Reunion', *Atlanta Constitution*, 19 June 1922, 1; 'Fiddlers' Convention Will Open Tonight', *Atlanta Constitution*, 10 April 1917, 7.
[115] 'Old Fiddler's Contest', *Jacksboro Gazette* [TX], 24 May 1917, 7.
[116] Richard Henry Little, 'Round About Chicago', *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 2 August 1910, 8.
[117] Sherill's recollection of contests is quoted in Huber, *Linthead Stomp*, 41. For medical assessments on ageing and heat, see K. B. Pandolf, 'Aging and Human Heat Tolerance,' *Experimental Aging Research* 23, no. 1 (March 1997): 69-105; Lawrence E. Hazelrigg and Melissa A. Hardy, 'Older Adult Migration to the Sunbelt: Assessing Income and Related Characteristics of Recent Migrants,' *Research on Aging* 17, no. 2 (June 1, 1995): 209-234.

> the old man before. This was accompanied by shouts from all over the house of 'Old man, go buy you a watch, and buy you a good one.'[118]

Although this incident further indicates the philanthropic function of contests, the invocation of the watch, which symbolically suggested Phares had 'spent' his time, suggests that some younger attendees pitied the old fiddlers for having lived too long.

While older age entails greater musical experience and talent, it also causes deterioration in musical capabilities. In the survey of fiddle music in *Etude* magazine mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the author, presumably an expert on classical violin, expressed amazement at the dexterity and abilities of old fiddlers:

> old and middle-aged people [often] say that they cannot play the violin because their fingers have grown too stiff, but here we have the spectacle of these old country fiddlers sawing off rapid jigs … How is it that the fingers of these old fellows have not grown too stiff for all this rapid fingering? The answer is that they have been playing for dances all their lives, and their fingers have not had time to get stiff.[119]

The author went on to praise the healthy nervous systems of country fiddlers, claiming that their lifetimes of hard rural living protected them from the muscular rheumatism that plagued older violinists.[120] If the writer was right to note the astonishing versatility and stamina of many old fiddlers, it is likely that these were exceptional cases. It can be assumed that there were numerous older fiddlers who could not perform at contests because of debilitating medical conditions. Social class and family circumstances could make age-related barriers surmountable. A case in point is Henry C. Gilliland, who suffered from periostitis of the leg and hip joint, muscular atrophy, and a 'shortening of the limb', yet at least owned property and a means of transportation, so had better chances of attending fiddle contests than some of his less well-off peers.[121] Similarly, old fiddlers who had family

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[118] R. L. Christian, a crippled soldier fiddler from Austin, was also treated to a shower of coins during his performance at the same contest: 'Old Fiddlers Contest', *Houston Daily Post*, 11 February 1900, 8.
[119] 'Aged Fiddlers', *Etude*, February 1929, 133.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Gilliland detailed his health issues in his autobiography: Gilliland, *Life and Battles of Henry C. Gilliland For Seventy Years: Wars of the Confederacy, Wars with the Indians and*

support networks could more easily travel to the contests. Tennessean fiddler Uncle Jimmy Thompson cajoled his niece into driving him in his truck to events.[122]

Appreciating some of the physical difficulties older male fiddlers faced helps to explain the gender imbalance at contests. Female fiddlers only rarely featured at contests, and it appears that no older female fiddler ever entered a competition. Even the idea of a young fiddler was seen as strange or outright inappropriate, partly because of religious animosities towards the sinful fiddle, but also due to ideas of the domesticated role of women in public life.[123] This situation reveals an essential hypocrisy regarding age and gender: the sexist notion that even young women were physically unable to perform the aggressive, fast-paced and loud fiddling necessary to win competitions likely kept many female fiddlers off contest stages; yet visibly debilitated old men were deemed 'able' candidates.

If young and old women were usually barred from fiddle contest stages, they played significant roles as organisers. Local women's groups, such as the Texas Association of Ladies in Waco and the Waynesville Business and Professional Women's Club, organised

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Wars with the 'Fiddle and Bow' (Altus, Oklahoma: n.p., 1915), 19. Kevin S. Fontenot's biographical sketch of Confederate veteran and prolific contest competitor indicates that Gilliland was relatively well-off and therefore capable of travelling to contests across the South: Kevin S. Fontenot, 'Country Music's Confederate Grandfather,' in *Country Music Annual 2001*, ed. Charles K Wolfe and James E. Akenson (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001), 192-193.

[122] Tony Russell, '"How Old Are You, Uncle Jimmy?" The Fiddler Who Fiddled With His Birthdate,' *Old Time Herald* 14, no. 4 (2016).

[123] Exceptions nevertheless occurred. One female fiddler competed against an all-male troupe at a fiddle contest in Newberry, South Carolina: 'The Fiddle And The Bow,' *Herald And News*, 23 March 1909, 8. Ideas about the uncontrollable nature of male sexuality also were a barrier for young female acts. In a 1936 cartoon strip in *Stand By* magazine, a caricature 'Grandpappy' of the real-life musician Lily May Ledford, with ubiquitous lengthy white beard, refuses to allow Ledford to join him at a contest as 'no man's got a chance agin' female competition.' The implication being that Ledford's attractiveness would win her the contest, not her musicianship. Ironically, the real-life Ledford was one of a small number of women to enter and win contests: 'Lily May: The Mountain Gal,' *Stand By*, November 1936, reprinted in Russell, *Country Music Originals*, 186. For more on Ledford, see Kristine M. McCusker, *Lonesome Cowgirls and Honky Tonk Angels: The Women of Barn Dance Radio* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 91. For more on the small number of female contestants at fiddlers' contests: Daniel, *Pickin' on Peachtree*, 39.

contests for old fiddlers.[124] As has already been shown, the UDC also organised contests. As Karen Cox argues, the UDC held a steadfast belief in the 'sacred duty' that underpinned their work with aged veterans, who they revered for both their patriotic service and longevity.[125] While this female mobilising must be viewed within the national picture, what Edward Ayers refers to as 'the great era of organization', these 'new women' were also the cause and product of changing expectations of white women's role in the New South. The organisation of fiddle contests by white southern women represented a small step towards expanding the southern female sphere, but it nevertheless was framed by patriarchal understanding of the female role as carer of frail male elders.[126] Although women seemingly wielded a small degree of autonomy when organising fiddle contests, they ultimately took on a highly gendered 'nurturing' role that primarily served to publicly reclaim the manhood of older men.

(Inter)generationalism

Fiddlers' contests, if dominated by elderly audiences and competitors, were also spaces for intergenerational contact. The *Atlanta Constitution* presented the wide age demographic of competitors at a 1906 contest as newsworthy, listing both the 'fiddlers who have grown gray since first they drew the bow across the catgut' and those 'whose youth

[124] 'Old Fiddlers Contest Planned at Waynesville,' *Franklin Press And The Highlands Maconian* [NC], 27 August 1936, 6.
[125] Cox argues that women were 'longtime leaders in the movement to memorialize the Confederacy' and 'active participants in debates over what would constitute a "new" South': Karen L. Cox, *Dixie's Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 1. For the increased involvement of women in 'the historical enterprise' in this period, see Julie Des Jardin: Julie Des Jardins, *Women and the Historical Enterprise in America: Gender, Race, and the Politics of Memory, 1880-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).
[126] Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South*, 334. Some caution must be had when referring to the 'new women' of the 'New South' as changes in gender roles during this period were neither all-encompassing nor irreversible: Marjorie Spruill Wheeler, *New Women of the New South: The Leaders of the Woman Suffrage Movement in the Southern States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Anastatia Sims, *The Power of Femininity in the New South: Women's Organizations and Politics in North Carolina, 1880-1930* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1997).

flashes from their eyes as it paces out joyously from their music.'[127] A poster for a 1928 fiddle convention held in Calhoun, Georgia, informed the public that it would be a 'treat for young and old'.[128] The meeting of old and young at contests served a social function. In 1927 a fiddlers' association in Tyler, Texas organised a contest of old fiddlers to entertain a county-wide collection of boys' agricultural clubs, presumedly in order to pass on their agrarian-based wisdom to the next generation.[129] The media presented intergenerational fiddle contests as venues in which younger generations could (re)discover their southern roots. Reporting on a 1915 contest in Macon, Georgia, one newspaper explained how 'the 1860s will be recalled vividly to the minds of grandmother and grandfather while the younger generation will get an insight into just about the manner in which the dances of that period were entered into.'[130] In 1922, the *Temple Daily Telegram* described how old fiddlers at a contest in Lufkin, Texas cast 'a spell of witchery on the young generation present.'[131] As Edward Ayers explains, 'The New South was an anxious place … people worried about the inability of both the young and the old to appreciate the other's concerns and hopes.'[132] In their own way, then, fiddlers' contests attempted to narrow the seemingly ever-widening 'generation gap' of the New South.

Ironically, attempts at intergenerational contact at fiddlers' contests also reinforced generational distinctions, sometimes with negative consequences. Contest organisers

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[127] 'Fiddling in Georgia', *Atlanta Constitution*, 1 July 1906, 4. The *Constitution* reported that the 1930 Convention featured 'old timers' alongside a lot of 'young fellows': 'Johnson To Seek Fiddlin' Honors Again', *Atlanta Constitution*, 14 September 1930, 5.
[128] Poster from the collection of Carson's daughter, Rosa Lee Carson Johnson, reprinted in Wiggins, *Fiddlin' Georgia Crazy*, 144. A reporter noted with surprise the 'crowds of mixed ages' at a 1919 Atlanta contest: Rusk, 'Old-Time Dances of South Liven Up the Gray Heroes Gathered, at Camp Johnston,' *Atlanta Constitution*, 8 October 1919, 10.
[129] Henry Edwards, 'County-Wide Meet of Gentry's Club Boys,' *Tyler Journal* [TX], 12 August 1927, 7.
[130] 'Old Time Fiddlers' Convention,' *Lakeland Evening Telegraph* [FL], 12 March 1915, 1.
[131] Charles W. Ingram, 'Old Fiddlers in Contest at Lufkin Play Breakdowns,' *Temple Daily Telegram* [TX], 31 March 1922, 3.
[132] Ayers provides a variety of issues which contributed to perceptions of a widening generational gap, including differences over the South's 'race problem', changing gender roles, the future of the southern economy, the impact of new technologies, and religious versus worldly values: Ayers, *The Promise of the New South*, xiii.

regularly segregated 'young' and 'old' fiddlers into separate competition streams. In some instances, this practice patronised older performers and attendees. Some mixed-age contests dictated that younger fiddlers compete with handicaps, the implication being that, for some, 'older' did not necessarily mean 'better'.[133] Other contests infantilised the elderly by scheduling daytime matinee sessions exclusively for children and the aged.[134] The 1919 Georgia Convention was advertised as particularly suitable entertainment for 'children and old folks', the last of whom had not 'ventured away from home for a year.' In 1929, the same convention held a daytime matinee for children and old people because they 'rarely venture forth at night.'[135]

On other occasions, bias towards elders at fiddlers' contests caused difficulties for younger fiddlers. Young performers were regularly admonished for attempting to bring 'modern' music to fiddle contests. In 1927, the *Atlanta Constitution* bemoaned that at contests there was 'Always some young fiddler, influenced by the omnipresent phonograph or perhaps a radio set, [who] attempts to please the assemblage with a waltz or fox trot, with a liberal jazz treatment. Always, too, he is frowned on.' By contrast, the *Constitution* framed old fiddlers as the vanguard against modern music and modernity. Uncle Eb Garston, an aged fiddler at a 1927 contest, almost sermonised to the *Constitution* about the youth of the

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[133] 'Old Fiddlers' Reunion', *Daily Herald* [Weatherford, TX], 9 July 1912, 1. In an interview with Charles Wolfe, the fiddler Ernie Hodges recalled receiving such handicaps as a young competitor in the 1920s and 1930s: Charles Wolfe, *The Devil's Box*, 205.

[134] E.g. 'Old-Time Fiddlers Furnish Big Treat For 4,000 People', *Atlanta Constitution*, 20 November 1920, 4; 'Georgia Fiddlers Gather To Fight for 1929 Title', *Atlanta Constitution*, 28 September 1929, 6; '82 Fiddlers Open Annual Contest', *Atlanta Constitution*, 19 November 1927, 9. For sociological and psychological studies concerning the infantilisation of the aged, see: Stephen M. Marson and Rasby M. Powell, 'Goffman and the Infantilization of Elderly Persons: A Theory in Development,' *Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare* 41, no. 4 (December 2014): 143-158; Jenny Hockey and Allison James, 'Infantilization As Social Discourse,' in *Growing Up And Growing Old: Ageing And Dependency In Life Course* (Newbury Park, California: Sage Publications, 1993), 9-44; Sonia Lynne Salari, 'Infantilization As Elder Mistreatment: Evidence From Five Adult Day Care Centers,' *Journal of Elder Abuse & Neglect* 14, no. 4 (2005): 351-365; Susan Krauss Whitbourne and Sarah Culgin, 'Evaluation of Intonation and Content of Speech Directed at the Aged,' *International Journal of Aging & Human Development* 41, no. 2 (1995): 109-117.

[135] 'Georgia Fiddlers Gather To Fight for 1929 Title', *Atlanta Constitution*, 28 September 1929, 6; 'Georgia Old-Time Fiddlers Open Convention Thursday', *Atlanta Constitution*, 16 November 1919, 8.

day: ‘These here phonographs and the radio air corruptin’ our boys … I got a nephew who could be a right smart fiddler if he'd try, but durned if he ain't clean forgot how to put snap and elbow grease into “The Arkansas Traveller”.’ Such reportage used aged fiddlers to push the notion that modern technologies, ‘dying’ musical traditions, and the corruption of youth morality were all interconnected phenomena. In the same report, the *Constitution* explained that contest attendees had nothing but contempt for the ‘profane melodies which have come out of New York's Tin Pan Alley to compete with the tunes their grandads played.’[136] Not all fiddlers’ contests held the same antimodernist outlook. In 1922, a Parent-Teacher Association in Millersburg, Kentucky organised a contest to raise funds for the local school to buy a radio. Nevertheless, most rejected some of the basic tropes and material features of modern life.[137]

Fiddle contests were routinely promoted and popularly understood as the antidote to popular music and jazz, styles perceived as quintessentially modern, urbane, northern, ‘black’, and *youthful*. In 1922, the local press in Brownwood, Texas, wrote that an old fiddlers’ contest successfully put a ‘Crimp in Jazz Music’ when the contestants began playing ‘Arkansas Traveller.’[138] The same year, a reporter in Lufkin, Texas wrote that ‘Jazz was crowded off the repertoire’ during a local contest.[139] At a contest in Chicago in 1918 that featured many southern fiddlers, the press praised contestants for playing ‘with that peculiar faithfulness to a time that the old fiddlers had and that modern orchestras have not.’[140] Fiddlers’ associations codified this antimodernism into the fabric of contests by establishing rules limiting the selections of contestants to ‘old music.’[141] To win the 1918

[136] ‘Gid Tanner, Famous Georgia Fiddler, Wins New Laurels’, *Atlanta Constitution*, 16 November 1927, 2.
[137] ‘Millersburg County High School Notes,’ *Bourbon News* [Paris, KY], 12 May 1922, 8.
[138] ‘Old East Texas Fiddlers Put Crimp in Jazz Music At Recent Big Reunion,’ *Brownwood Bulletin* [TX], 14 July 1922, 1.
[139] Charles W. Ingram, ‘Old Fiddlers in Contest at Lufkin Play Breakdowns’, *Temple Daily Telegram* [TX], 31 March 1922, 3.
[140] Richard Henry Little, ‘Round About Chicago’, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 2 August 1910, 8.
[141] A contest in Texas in 1929 vaguely limited competitors to playing ‘old songs.’ An interregional contest in Washington featuring mostly southern fiddlers in 1911 requested

Georgia Convention, for example, younger performers were expected to perform 'the tunes grandpa taught them'.[142]

Hopes that old fiddlers could resurrect older vernacular musics and Old South values, and bridge the generation gap, did not come without nagging doubts. There is a sense of fatalism in the *Hickory Democrat*'s description of a Newton, North Carolina contest in 1912: 'The old time Southern fiddlers are passing and before many years they will be gone.'[143] In 1920, the *Houston Post* went further, noting that the 'real music' of a local contest were 'peculiar only to the fiddler of an age gradually passing away.''[144] Just as significantly, some audiences left entirely unconvinced about the more staged acts of age adulation that occasionally went on at contests. During one UDC-sponsored contest in Atlanta in 1924, organisers failed to persuade young female attendees to dress in their 'grandmothers' clothes' or dance the Virginia reel.[145]

Despite the occasional failures of this strategy, the presentation of vernacular traditions and Old South values as under the threat of extinction, and the positioning of aged fiddlers as stewards of those traditions, gave fiddlers' contests their unique appeal, particularly for some of the financial interests behind them. As well as raising funds for elderly veterans or contestants, some contests raised funds for local schools, nurses, wildlife preservation, orphanages, training for young business entrepreneurs, and hospitals. Civic 'betterment' societies, parent-teacher associations and charities all organised fiddle contests

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only songs written before the seemingly arbitrary year of 1898. The Georgia Old Fiddlers' Association's committee ruled out 'new-fangled tunes that have drifted into the backwoods': T. J. Molloy, 'Old Fiddlers' Contest To Be Held Here May 4', *Timpson Weekly Times* [TX], 4 December 1929, 1; H. S. Reese, 'Old Time Fiddlers Contest', *News-Record* [Marshal, NC], 11 June 1926, 1; 'Georgia Old-Time Fiddlers Open Convention Thursday', *Atlanta Constitution*, 16 November 1919, 8.

[142] 'Fiddlers Will Hold Annual Convention in Atlanta Feb. 27', *Atlanta Constitution*, 10 February 1918, 1.

[143] 'Old Fiddlers In Newton,' *Hickory Democrat* [NC], 8 February 1912, 4.

[144] 'Glory of Dixie Shines in South's Greatest Parade', *Houston Post* [TX], 10 September 1920, 1.

[145] *Sunday American*, 9 November 1924, 1.

as fundraisers.[146] Essentially, musical performances from respected aged fiddlers from the local community were a suitably wholesome kind of entertainment for a variety of causes. Reporting on a 1908 contest in aid of the Newberry Civic Association in South Carolina, the *Hickory News* explained, without providing any particular reason, that 'old fiddlers' were the perfect fit for the event's 'worthy cause.'[147]

Businesses as diverse and as modern as country stores, freight companies, garages, and furnishing companies that sold radios also sponsored fiddlers' contests with the ulterior motive of promoting their products and services across the generations.[148] That contests were popular events which sometimes drew hundreds of potential consumers was reason enough for many of these businesses. However, the generational dimension of the contests exuded an authoritative aura of tradition that made them even more appealing for businesses to latch onto, particularly those selling modern produce who wished to cloak their brand with a

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[146] Chris Goertzen, *Southern Fiddlers and Fiddle Contests*, 52; 'Fiddler's Convention', *Franklin Times* [Louisburg, NC], 12 March 1915, 1; 'Old Time Fiddlers Convention', *Danbury Reporter* [NC], 3 December 1924, 8; 'Old Fiddlers Contest Planned at Waynesville', *Franklin Press And The Highlands Maconian* [NC], 27 August 1936, 6; 'Listen, Folks! There's Another Big, Old-Time Fiddlers Convention', *Watauga Democrat* [Boone, NC], 3 July 1930, 2; 'The Old Time Fiddling Mountaineers', *Carolina Mountaineer* [Waynesville, NC], 19 March 1925, 6; 'Fiddlers' Convention Here', *Pointer* [High Point, NC], 3 November 1923, 1; 'Georgia Old-Time Fiddlers Open Convention Thursday', *Atlanta Constitution*, 16 November 1919, 8; 'Fiddlers' Contest', *Fairmont West Virginian*, 11 May 1905, 8.

[147] 'The Fiddle And The Bow', *Herald And News* [Newberry, SC], 23 March 1909, 8.

[148] Jenkins' Garage specifically advertised their contest as an 'Old Fiddlers' Special', and recommended punters also drop by the garage for repairs. The Traveling Freight Agents' Association organised an old fiddlers' contest for agents and families: 'Carroll County Fair: Bigger And Better Than Ever,' *Carroll County Democrat* [Huntingdon, TN], 7 October 1921, 1; 'Program Includes Barbecue and Contest Between Fiddlers,' *Hopkinsville Kentuckian*, 1 April 1904, 1. Punters could pick up tickets for a 1917 Atlanta fiddle contest from the Glover Soda company. In Forest City, North Carolina, in 1926, a daytime fiddle contest of 'old fiddlers' was the entertainment for the opening of a feed store. Tickets for the 1919 Georgia Convention in Atlanta were available from the Cable Piano Company store, a business that also sold violins and became later sponsors for the 1922 Convention. Tickets for a Fairmont, West Virginia contest in 1919 could be bought from several local stores who were advertised in the local press: 'Fiddlers' Convention Will Open Tonight', *Atlanta Constitution*, 10 April 1917, 7; 'Coffield's Staf-O-Life Feed Store Grand Opening', *Forest City Courier* [NC], 16 September 1926, 3; 'Georgia Old-Time Fiddlers Open Convention Thursday', *Atlanta Constitution*, 16 November 1919, 8; 'Georgia Fiddlers To Meet Tonight For Championship', *Atlanta Constitution*, 29 September 1922, 7; 'Local Social Events: Fiddlers' Contest', *West Virginian* [Fairmont, WV], 21 May 1919, 3.

veneer of local heritage. Indeed, many of the businesses that sponsored fiddlers' contests broadly fitted into the model of New South business that Ayers argues both reflected the changing economies of the region and also 'sped up the reorientation of plantation-belt economic life'.[149]

The age context of fiddlers' contest also explains why pharmacies and medicine shows sponsored them. A pharmacy in Alto, Texas in 1929 held a contest on its premises.[150] In Whitewright, Texas in 1932, a contest and a medicine show were the twin highlights at a 'trades day'.[151] Pharmacies and medicine shows after all, were distributers of a wider formal and informal pharmaceutical industry in the early twentieth century US that increasingly exploited fears about ageing and sold ideas of 'rejuvenation'. Different medical hawkers seemingly recognised that old fiddlers' contests drew together in a public space a largely middle-aged and older audience that also constituted their consumer base.[152]

The intergenerational quality of fiddle contests reinforced notions of the white South as a tightknit community or 'family' at a historical moment when the stabilities of white southern communities and families were perceived to be under threat from the more fluid

[149]Ayers, The Promise of the New South, 13.
[150] F. L. Weimar, 'Old Fiddlers To Meet Saturday', *Alto Herald* [TX], 9 May 1929, 1. Western Pharmacy took the initiative to inform readers of a local newspaper to come 'meet their friends at the air conditioned Western Pharmacy': O. C. Harrison, 'Welcome Old Timers, Sponsors, Contestants and Visitors', *Baylor County Banner* [Seymour, TX], 19 July 1945, 6. Similarly, an advertisement for Vinol, a 'remedy' for age-related tiredness, in the *Hickory Democrat* in 1909 was placed immediately adjacent to a notice for an old fiddlers' contest, perhaps in an attempt to attract their shared target demographic. The advert quoted a 75-year-old Vinol-user who would 'say to any old person … to come get a bottle': 'Fiddler's Contest', *Hickory Democrat*, 20 May 1909, 3. Similarly, in a 1919 issue of the *West Virginian*, an advert for 'Plant Juice', a 'remedy' for rheumatism was placed adjacent to the advert for a contest: 'Local Social Events: Fiddlers' Contest', *West Virginian* [Fairmont, WV], 21 May 1919, 3.
[151] *Whitewright Sun* [Whitewright, Texas], 19 May 1932, 6.
[152] Anti-ageing cosmetics have a history dating back to antiquity, but began to be sold commercially on a mass scale in the early twentieth century: Roberta Honigman and David J Castle, 'Aging and Cosmetic Enhancement,' *Clinical Interventions in Aging* 1, no. 2 (June 2006): 115-119.

demographic universe created by migration and urbanisation.[153] Anxieties about these changes manifested in the use of kinship terminology with a generational or temporal dimension, such as 'Uncle', 'Daddy', or 'Grandpa'.[154] In truth, the 'agedness' of some kinship titles was ambiguous: an audience may have easily suspected that 'Grandpa' Jesse Williamson, for example, was indisputably old, but were probably less clear about 'Uncle' Bob Bivens.[155] Some titles therefore may have indicated a performer's seniority, familiarity, or *older* age, rather than their old age. Moreover, age-related kinship titles were just one form of the colourful nicknaming that went on at fiddle contests. A 1919 contest between Georgian and Texan fiddlers featured not only 'Uncle' Bill Byers, but also 'Laughing' Ben

[153] C. Vann Woodward's classic text on the Jim Crow era provides a good starting point for understanding how contemporary fears about the changing southern family were shaped by race. Joan E. Cashin and others have demonstrated, however, that anxieties about the southern family had their precedents in the antebellum and Civil War-era South: C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955); Joan E. Cashin, 'Households, Kinfolk, and Absent Teenagers: The Demographic Transition in the Old South,' *Journal of Family History* 25, no. 2 (April 1, 2000): 141-157; Peter W. Bardaglio, *Reconstructing the Household: Families, Sex, and the Law in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Craig Thompson Friend and Anya Jabour, eds., *Family Values in the Old South* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011); Marie S. Molloy, '"A Noble Class of Old Maids" Surrogate Motherhood, Sibling Support, and Self-Sufficiency in the Nineteenth-Century White, Southern Family,' *Journal of Family History* 41, no. 4 (October 1, 2016): 402-429.

[154] A selection of these figures includes 'Uncle' Buren, 'Daddy' Perkins, 'Grandpa' Jesse Williamson, 'Uncle' Eli Watts, 'Uncle' Billy Hay, 'Uncle' Bob Bivens, 'Uncle' Bill Byers, 'Uncle' Bud Barron, and 'Uncle' Eb Garston: 'The Old Fiddlers Contest,' *Weekly Herald* [Weatherford, TX], 31 July 1902, 1; 'Fiddlers Convention Quite Interesting', *News-Record* [Marshal, NC], 24 December 1926, 5; 'Fannin Fiddlers Issue Bold Defiance To Entire State', *Atlanta Constitution*, 9 November 1919, 13; 'New Aspirants To Renown Will Seek Fiddler's Crown', *Atlanta Constitution*, 13 November 1927, 8; 'Fiddlers Had A Convention,' *Washington Post*, 26 January 1908, 2; 'Georgia Fiddlers To Meet Tonight For Championship,' *Atlanta Constitution*, 29 September 1922, 7; 'Fiddlin' Texans Issue Bold Defiance To Local Bowmen,' *Atlanta Constitution*, 9 October 1919, 6; Carlock, 'Wins Fiddle Contest: 'Uncle' Bud Barron', *Paducah Post* [TX], 20 May 1937, 3; 'Gid Tanner, Famous Georgia Fiddler, Wins New Laurels,' *Atlanta Constitution*, November 16, 1927, 2. Old fiddlers seemingly referred to themselves using such titles. The *Constitution* reported that William Whitehead entered their offices, introduced himself as 'Uncle' William, and instructed them to advertise the Georgia Fiddlers' Convention, implying that he himself used the title: 'Fiddlers Are Rarin' to Come, Says 'Uncle William' Whitehead,' *Atlanta Constitution*, 17 January 1916, 5.

[155] 'Fannin Fiddlers Issue Bold Defiance To Entire State', *Atlanta Constitution*, 9 November 1919, 13.

Singer, 'Banjo Picking' Bill, and other age-related nicknames such as 'Kid the Fiddler.'[156] Still, the greater prevalence of kinship titles that signalled maturity suggests that there was a certain appeal in seeing an act who was presented as if they were their own older family member.

The onstage construction of a multigenerational family, and the temporalised 'battle' between 'new' and 'old' music, masked more troubling racial contexts. The 'whiteness' of old fiddlers' contests to some degree was contextualised by the growing popularity of ostensibly 'black' musical genres such as jazz and blues. More generally, this was era of intense segregation and white supremacy. In this context, elderly white fiddlers helped anchor a comforting image of a 'pure' white southern family. In Atlanta, for example, fears of the racial miscegenation in the 1910s and 1920s, the 'threatening' idea of a 'New Negro' not born in slavery, and a corresponding dissemination of eugenics ideology, underpinned much of familial intergenerationalism at the city's old fiddlers' contests. As Gavin Campbell argues, just as the entirely white Atlanta fiddle contests were getting underway in the 1910s, Georgian politicians attempted to force the one-drop rule into state law.[157]

Tied to these constructions of 'whiteness' at old fiddlers' contests were also conceptions of 'blackness'. Due in no small part to the segregated nature of much southern public life, black fiddlers rarely performed at contests, but a few exceptions reveal a lot about the racial contexts of the phenomenon. A photograph of competitors at a Fort Worth

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[156] 'Fiddlin' Texans Issue Bold Defiance To Local Bowmen,' *Atlanta Constitution*, 9 October 1919, 6. Exotic or 'ethnic' stage characterisations were also popular, such as the fiddle contestant 'Natchee the Indian': Peterson, *Creating Country Music*, 57-63.

[157] Campbell, *Music and the Making of a New South*, 109-112. Several southern states implemented 'one-drop' laws in the 1910s and 1920s, efforts which flourished following emancipation and were intensified by Populist politics, added to the widespread codification of Jim Crow segregation following the Supreme Court's *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision of 1896. Though scholars have shown that such laws and sentiments were delivered and experienced differently for blacks and whites across time and place, it is fair to argue that many southern whites during this period were concerned or actively working against the 'polluting' of the white 'race': F. James Davis, *Who Is Black?: One Nation's Definition* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 2010); Matthew Pratt Guterl, *The Color of Race in America, 1900-1940* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2009).

contest in 1901 shows a crowd of old white fiddlers, accompanied by a solitary elderly African American competitor [Appendix 1.3].[158] Local press reports of a Dallas contest in 1900 observed that 'Echoes of plantation life were heard when an aged darky caressed the strings with his bow'.[159] The 'novel' appearance of aged black fiddlers inspired racialised memories of the antebellum era that were distinct, if not entirely dissimilar to those of elderly white fiddlers. Ultimately, elderly black performers helped conjure white fantasies of a bucolic plantation past that they were unlikely to recognise. Appearances of aged blacks at fiddle contests figured into a wider exhibition of 'happy old darkies' in public spaces. At 'Old Slave Days' reunions, such as one held in Southern Pines, North Carolina in 1934, testimonies of aged, ex-slaves blacks, as mediated by whites, were used to defend the 'benevolent' system of slavery.[160] Unlike fiddle contests, however, an occasional side feature of such events was the singing of spirituals, both by and 'for' elderly ex-slaves, reflecting a wider white curation of 'appropriate' black music to be performed in public for white entertainment.[161]

Significantly, at old fiddlers' contests, some elderly white fiddlers were considered 'authentic' performers of older black music merely because they were old enough to recall hearing slaves sing in the Antebellum era. Audiences at a seemingly all-white contest in Houston, Texas in 1921, for example, witnessed a performance of 'inimitable negro songs which only the real fiddlers, the old-time fiddlers, can play.'[162] By contrast, some young fiddlers, such as Clayton McMichen, 'blacked up' at fiddlers' conventions in order to perform 'plantation' numbers. Seemingly, old age ensured southern musicians a legitimate

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[158] 'Old Fiddlers Contest at City Hall, Fort Worth, Texas', 1901, Jack White Photograph Collection, University of Texas Arlington Libraries, available at https://library.uta.edu/digitalgallery-beta/img/10003898, accessed 15 May 2019.
[159] 'Old Fiddlers Convention,' *Johnson City Comet* [TN], 10 May 1900, 1.
[160] 'Old Slaves at 1934 Spring Festival', *The Pilot* [Southern Pines, NC], 23 November 1934, 8.
[161] For a full analysis of this particular Old Slave Day, see Catherine A. Stewart, *Long Past Slavery: Representing Race in the Federal Writers' Project* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 29-32.
[162] 'Old Fiddlers Contest To Be Feature of Fair', *Houston Post* [TX], 11 May 1921, 14; 'Old Fiddlers Convention', *Johnson City Comet* [TN], 10 May 1900, 1.

claim to the 'black' music of the Old South that bypassed the need either for musicians to wear blackface or for organisers to put actual black performers onstage.[163]

Fascination with old age also intersected with white curiosity for and fear of black culture. The direct ties between old fiddlers' contests, southern politicians, and white supremacist groups emphasises how race politics fed into the intergenerational dimension of the events. Several politicians viewed old fiddlers' contests as venues to 'sell' their message to their electorate. During the 'Solid South' era, fiddlers' contest were common features of Democratic Party campaigns, and Democrats occasionally appeared as special guests at otherwise non-political fiddlers' contests,. In 1911, for example, Charles Brantley Aycock, an ex-North Carolina Governor and then Democratic candidate for US Senate, delivered a speech at a community picnic in Charlotte immediately preceding an old fiddlers' contest. Aycock had long been a fixture of the white supremacist wing of the Democratic Party. In 1903, as Governor, Aycock delivered a speech on 'The Negro Problem' which made the case for the state's continued exclusion of blacks from political apparatuses. By associating himself with fiddlers' contests, Aycock aligned himself not only to the older music of his largely rural constituency, but also with elderly white 'Tar Heelers' who embodied the racial status quo.[164] More extreme examples of politicised contests suggest they could serve a racial function: as several scholars have shown, some fiddlers' contests in the 1920s were sponsored by the reformed Ku Klux Klan.[165]

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[163] Russell, *Country Music Originals*, 42.

[164] 'All Ready for Big Picnic,' *Charlotte News* [NC], 8 August 1911, 5; A Democrat function in Jonesboro, Tennessee in 1916 featured a fiddle contest: 'Democrats To Celebrate at Jonesboro Saturday,' *Johnson City Comet* [TN], 16 November 1916, 2.

[165] Cauthen and Campbell both note that fiddle contests in 1925 were sponsored by local chapters of the Klan in Birmingham, Alabama, and Mountain City, Tennessee. A now famous photograph of performers at a Mountain City contest features a poster for the event indicating the Klan's involvement. Fiddlin' John Carson, one of the contestants, was a Klan member. As Peter La Chapelle has shown, however, Klan-sponsored contests also occurred in California and Oklahoma, indicating that its involvement was not uniquely a southern phenomenon: Cauthen, *With Fiddle & Well-Rosined Bow*, 192-195; Campbell, *Music and the Making of a New South*, 135; Chapelle, *Proud to Be an Okie*, 13.

Politicised fiddling, however, has a long history in southern electioneering and was not necessarily always associated with racial politics or age. Georgia politician Tom Watson fiddled onstage during his various political campaigns on both Democrat and Populist tickets as his racial views shifted from being in favour of black enfranchisement to identifying as a white supremacist.[166] In 1938, Al Gore Sr. fiddled his way to a congressional seat while in his thirties.[167] The national press lapped up the impromptu fiddle contests that peppered the Tennessee gubernatorial campaign between brothers and young political opponents Bob and Alf Taylor (Democrat and Republican respectively).[168] Contests, likewise, were not always tied to one political party. An old fiddlers' convention in Roberta, Georgia in 1906, for example, featured 'general handshaking' between local politicians of all parties. In 1924, a convention was organised at a courthouse in Danbury, North Carolina as part of a nonpartisan event for the presidential election.[169] While Sari Edelstein is right to claim that 'age itself is a political weapon', in the case of old fiddlers' contests, it was a tool that could

[166] That being said, Watson's antisemitic beliefs remained relatively consistent throughout this period: Peter La Chapelle, *I'd Fight the World: A Political History of Old-Time, Hillbilly, and Country Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 1-10.
[167] While the Gore campaign was much more complicated, his fiddle playing at several public events helped distinguish him from other candidates with broadly similar policy proposals: Anthony J. Badger, *Albert Gore, Sr.: A Political Life* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 1-2, 29.
[168] Still, ageing became an important factor for Bob and Alf Taylor in their later years. Bob went on to give publics lectures in which he explained that fiddle music could woo 'an aged mother with her white locks and wrinkled face', and that fiddle contests were places where one saw 'old men tottering on the staff, with broken hearts and tear stained faces, and heard them plead for their wayward boys.' 'Fiddler's Contest', *Hickory Democrat*, 20 May 1909, 3; Robert. L Taylor, *Gov. Bob Taylor's Tales: The Fiddle and the Bow, The Paradise of Fools, Visions and Dreams* (Nashville: DeLong Rice & Co., 1896), 61. Alf went on to fiddle against 'Johnny Bass, a 'grizzled veteran', and inmate of the Nashville Soldiers' Home' onstage during his 1921 gubernatorial campaign, perhaps in an attempt to show that he literally, in his words, 'yielded to no one in his love for Dixie'. 'Alf Taylor Welcomes Vets At Chattanooga', *Atlanta Constitution*, 26 October 1921, 1; 'Fiddle Orchestra Opens Reunion of Confederates', *Houston Post* [TX], 26 October 26, 1921, 3. During his 1921 campaign, Taylor also used his own old age to his advantage by telling the story of "Old Limber", an aged foxhound who outwits its younger competitors to win the race: Paul Deresco Augsburg, *Bob and Alf Taylor: Their Lives and Lectures, the Story of Senator Robert Love Taylor and Governor Alfred Alexander Taylor* (Morristown, Tennessee: Morristown Book Company, 1925), 81-86.
[169] Fred Lewis, 'Third District Fiddlers Entertain Immense Crowd,' *Atlanta Constitution*, 30 June 1906, 6; 'Old Time Fiddlers Convention', *Danbury Reporter* [NC], 22 October 1924, 4.

be wielded for entirely distinct political movements.[170]

Conclusion

Old fiddlers stood in for a variety of real and imagined 'pasts', whether the Confederacy, the Old South, or a more abstract, fluid vision of agrarian premodernity. Romanticisation about the Civil War Generation loomed large at contests. It is significant that even something as banal as the estimation of age became tied to Civil War chronology. One review of a contest estimated the age of contestants by telling readers '[they] were furnishing the music for barn dances when the first Confederate soldier … was slain at Bethel.'[171] More abstract notions about the loss of, or threat to the countryside, vernacular musical culture, racial and patriarchal orthodoxies, local community, and the white southern family underpinned the appeal of old fiddlers' contests. The 'yesteryears' that were reimagined at contests, through the medium of elders, were responses to contemporary fears about economic and technological modernisation, movements towards black and female social and geographic mobility, and the traumas of the First World War, amongst other developments. Aged fiddlers were avatars for these junctures in time, identity and tradition. More importantly, however, one of the functions of contests was to 'rejuvenate' otherwise debilitated elderly southerners and thereby symbolically 'repair' some of the ruptures to the social fabric wrought by modernity.

The tensions of modernity nevertheless were woven into the fabric of old fiddlers' contests. Whether for benevolence, business or politics, many individuals and groups associated their message or product with the events. Contests were popular and sometimes large gatherings that were guaranteed to bring together substantial audiences of potential

[170] Edelstein, *Adulthood and Other Fictions*, 1.
[171] 'Fiddlers Had A Convention,' *Washington Post*, 26 January 1908, 2.

benefactors, consumers, and voters.[172] The social, economic, political and demographic transitions occurring in the early twentieth century meant many white southerners, notably farmers, were accumulating buying and political power that they previously did not have.[173] A variety of interests therefore capitalised on fiddle contests as older fiddlers gave the entertainment a sense of wholesomeness that appealed to the cultural tastes of particular audiences.

The most significant characteristics of old fiddlers' contests in the context of this dissertation is that the aged themselves frequently were stars *and* organisers of such events. In this sense, old fiddlers' contests preceded chronologically the self-organisation and consciousness raising of the aged during the pension movements of the 1920s and 1930s. Indeed, it is notable that contests which provided financial support for the elderly became popular at a time when few such securities were available for aged southerners. Moreover, that southerners were willing to pay sixty cents to see a group of elderly fiddlers (or audience members) play or reminisce about old times implies a certain deference to older age existed in the South in the musical world, if not yet in the political realm.[174] The pseudo-relief function of old fiddlers' contests, filling the gap left by state and federal aid, was the

[172] This is particularly true of the bigger events, such as community picnics, farmers' days and county fairs that routinely drew substantial crowds. Prior to the advent of radio and other mass media, such events were important backgrounds for selling goods and ideas: 'Pickens County Fair,' *Sentinel-Journal* [Pickens, SC], 10 September 1908, 1; 'Pensacola Interstate Fair,' *Pensacola Journal* [FL], 14 September 1913, 2; 'Old Fiddlers Contest To Be Feature of Fair,' *Houston Post*, 11 May 1921, 14; R. F. Cates, 'Friendship Fair To Have Entertainments,' *Bartlett Tribune and News* [TX], 19 October 1928, 6; 'Labor Day Celebrations,' *Putnam County Herald* [Cookeville, TX], 24 August 1911, 5.

[173] The size of the electorate fluctuated in the early twentieth century South as blacks and poor white southerners were disenfranchised. Poll taxes, for example, quickly caused a turnout decline of around 15 percent in southern states after their introduction at the turn of the century. These laws were only disproportionately and gradually unpicked in the ensuing decades, but the 1910s and 1920s saw a growth of middle-class whites in rural areas who could afford to pay previously prohibitive voter registration fees: Benjamin Highton, 'Voter Registration and Turnout in the United States', *Perspectives on Politics* 2, no. 3 (September 2004): 508-509; Ayers, *The Promise of the New South*, 303-305.

[174] Attendees at the Atlanta contest, for example, committed anywhere up to sixty cents for their ticket, which, though not a huge sum, does indicate that audiences were making a significant choice with their free time and expendable income to see both aged fiddlers and support a local cause: 'Georgia Fiddlers On Edge for Big Old-Time Reunion,' *Atlanta Constitution*, 7 November 1920, 7.

most tangible expression of this, but the broader reification of age in contest culture spread into the mass media and therefore around the country at a time in which age politics were encroaching into the national discourse.

Fiddle contests placed 'old' musicians and audiences, as well as 'old' music, at the heart of white southern musical culture.[175] In 1937, folklorists John and Alan Lomax from the Library of Congress documented many elderly performers at the Galax, Virginia contest.[176] There are echoes between old fiddlers' contests and early folk festivals in the 1920s and 1930s, such as the National Folk Festival and the Mountain Dance and Folk Festival in Asheville, North Carolina. Each of these events, like fiddle contests, presented older performers as the authentic bearers of vernacular traditions.[177] In turn, these festivals and fiddle contests were inspirations for influential future figures of the postwar roots music revival, such as Pete Seeger who attended such events in the 1930s, and who would later promote elderly folk musicians at public events such as the Newport Folk Festival.[178] Ironically, as the next chapter shows, the most immediate legacy of old fiddlers' contests would be in the world of radio and records, the modern mass media which partly contributed to the antimodernist appeal of the contests.

[175] Diane Pecknold argues that by putting old songs back in the public sphere, old fiddlers' contests were vital to the beginnings of the country music industry: Diane Pecknold, *The Selling Sound: The Rise of the Country Music Industry* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 13.
[176] For the Lomaxes repeated experiences in Galax over their careers, see John Szwed, *Alan Lomax: The Man Who Recorded the World* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011), 183, 317.
[177] David E. Whisnant has shown how fiddle contests were a source of material for folklorist Cecil Sharp's trips to the Appalachian Mountains, as well as folk festivals: David E. Whisnant, *All That Is Native & Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region*, 25th Anniversary Edition (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 120. For more on folk festivals, see Michael Ann Williams, *Staging Tradition: John Lair and Sarah Gertrude Knott* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 1-17.
[178] Seeger was inspired to play the banjo after attending the Mountain Dance and Folk Festival in 1936: David King Dunaway, *How Can I Keep from Singing: Pete Seeger* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981), 48-49.

Chapter Two

The Advancing Age: Old Age in Old-Time Music

In 1926, Uncle Dave Macon, a retiree who had only been a professional musician for a few years, performed as part of a programme in the Lebeck Brothers department store in Nashville, Tennessee.[1] The event was staged in the window display and broadcast live over Nashville station WBAW. Alongside Macon in the 'Window Broadcasting Studio' was a representative of New York cosmetics company Elizabeth Arden with a presentation entitled 'Care of the Skin'. The title of the programme, 'The Advancing Age', referred ostensibly to the sense of rapid technological progress and modernity that characterised the era, identifying the store with 'the achievements of inventive American minds in advancing communication and technology'. Yet the dual meaning of the phrase is hard to ignore given the main attractions were a 'happy old fellow and his banjo' delivering 'old time fun', and a seller from Arden, a company that specialised in cosmetics that made consumers appear younger.[2] 'The Advancing Age' show was filled with curious juxtapositions: a wrinkled performer, for whom ageing was a central part of his act, alongside a sales pitch for anti-ageing cosmetics; a 'veteran string artist' promoting a department store 'overflowing with modern merchandise for modern people.'[3] This chapter unpacks these incongruities, and other seemingly irreconcilable tensions - between modernity and premodernity; consumer capitalism and vernacular traditions of the US South; new technology and old age - that

[1] 'The Advancing Age', *Nashville Tennessean*, 18 November 1926, 7.
[2] Caroline Searing and Hannah Zelig describe Arden as one of the first companies in the twentieth century to 'imply that the user could look younger through the use of cosmetics': Caroline Searing and Hannah Zeilig, 'Fine Lines: Cosmetic Advertising and the Perception of Ageing Female Beauty', *International Journal of Ageing and Later Life* 11, no. 1 (2017): 10-11; Penny Dade, *All Made Up: 100 Years of Cosmetics Advertising* (London: Middlesex University Press, 2007), 8.
[3] 'Mystery And Charm of Radio To Be Revealed In Store', *Nashville Tennessean*, 15 November 1926, 10. It is impossible to know how connected the billing of Macon and Arden were. While it may have been coincidental, as Macon was a popular local recording and broadcasting artist, and Arden were making moves into department stores across the country, it is equally possible that literally 'displaying' an aged character like Macon reminded consumers of their own age.

characterised the careers of Macon and a selection of aged southern performers on radio and records.

Relatively few recording and radio musicians of any genre in the 1920s and 1930s were identifiably ‘old’ (in their late fifties or older). Notable exceptions were performers of old-time music. Many of the pioneering records labels (OKeh, Brunswick, Paramount, Gennett, Victor, Vocalion, and Columbia) and southern radio stations (WBAP, Fort Worth; WSM, Nashville; WHAS, Louisville) employed at least one old musician to perform old-time music. Most of these old performers were southern and benefited from decisions within the music industry to commercialise vernacular musics of the South. Even though these older performers were some of the first and most popular acts to record and broadcast old-time music, few scholars have evaluated how ageing shaped their careers. This chapter firstly outlines how old fiddlers became a regular feature of radio and records in the 1920s. Secondly, it assesses in more depth the experiences and representations of old age in the careers of six elderly old-time acts - Capt. Moses J. Bonner, Uncle Henry C. Gilliland, Uncle Jimmy Thompson, Uncle Dave Macon, Granny Harper and Ma and Pa McCormick - who were prominent figures in commercial old-time music on radio and records from the 1920s to the 1950s.

While other marketing terms existed alongside ‘old-time’, it was one of the first and most commonly used by labels in the 1920s and 1930s. The temporal dimension of the old-time label is significant: there was a keen sense of remembered and imagined pasts in the production, promotion, and reception of the music. When record companies categorised their products into series names, such as ‘Old Southern Tunes’, ‘Old-Time Tunes’, and ‘Old Familiar Tunes’, first and foremost they established that the music was ‘old’. Equally, barn dance radio shows, in name at least, were a revival of a supposedly ‘endangered’, centuries-old tradition. Through a variety of means, not least the performance of old songs, promoters and producers of old-time music tethered the sound for sale to ‘old-times’. Another logical step was to bring old musicians into the studio.

Old-time music emerged from a sense that society was living in acutely 'modern times'. As with fiddle contests, the wider appeal of old-time music, a nostalgic genre by its very name, is contextualised by the challenges to gender, class, and racial hierarchies in the South; the mostly white male musicians discussed here were idealised as particularly southern talismans of whiteness, rusticity, and manhood, and a range of associative traditions and values believed to be under threat from modernity. Even the few women discussed here, by and large, acted or were portrayed as role models of southern grandmotherhood.

Another feature of 'modern times' were the technological developments in broadcasting and recording that profoundly changed the way music was made, sold and consumed.[4] The sense of modernity or 'newness' that accompanied radio and records contrasted with and arguably intensified the 'old-fashionedness' and, as shown here, 'agedness' of old-time music. This tension between modern technology and ageing bodies is a central theme of this chapter. Radio and records enabled otherwise physically restricted elderly performers to transmit their music across vast distances to audiences they would have struggled to have reached.[5] However, the physical labour the industries required of older performers, coupled with difficulties adapting to newer forms of musical activity, were obstacles that, if not exclusively age-related, were more challenging for those in their advanced years.[6] The relatively small number of older musicians discussed in this chapter

[4] As important as records and radio were, they did not entirely replace live concerts or other forms of 'musicking'. Many musicians, for example, perceived radio and records as ephemeral sources of income and personal pride compared to live performance: David Suisman, *Selling Sounds: The Commercial Revolution in American Music* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2012), 101; Pekka Gronow and Ilpo Saunio, *International History of the Recording Industry* (London and New York: Cassell, 1999), 37.
[5] Arguably, radio and records 'enabled' some performers, whether elderly or with disabilities. Nevertheless, as George McKay shows, performers with disabilities over the twentieth century have still worked within the broadly ableist parameters of the recording and broadcasting worlds: George McKay, *Shakin' All Over: Popular Music and Disability* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2013), 21-30.
[6] 'Horn fright' and, in the electric recording era, 'microphone fright', for example, were issues for young and old musicians in early roots music, and generally in the broadcasting and recording industries: Brian Ward and Patrick Huber, *A&R Pioneers: Architects of*

testifies to this paradox: while some felt the real benefits of modern technology, age could also be an inhibiting force.

As with old fiddlers' contests, there were few equivalent aged race artists in the 1920s and 1930s, but there are some notable exceptions. Daddy Stovepipe, an African American one-man band who recorded several country blues tunes for Gennett in 1924, was born in 1867, possibly making him the earliest-born blues performer ever recorded. However, his age seemingly was not a feature of his public persona or recorded output. Even his name, which implied a certain familial seniority, may have been used in a sexual sense as many of his recordings were racy duets with his slightly younger wife, Mississippi Sarah.[7] However, that an advertisement categorised his record featuring 'Sundown Blues'/'Stove Pipe Blues' (Gennett 5459) as 'Darkey Character Songs' suggests there was an attempt to present him as something of a novelty 'old darkey' for white audiences.[8] Bill Katon, an African American fiddler in his sixties who performed over WOS in Jefferson City, Missouri in the 1920s, was born in 1865. Like Stovepipe, there was little reference to his age in the media, but he was at least referred to as an 'old-time colored fiddler' who played 'barn dance' programmes. This labelling suggests that Katon, like Stovepipe, was associated with a *white* listenership who enjoyed hearing some vaguely defined 'old-time' music, but played by an older African American.[9] If these exceptions hint that elderly African American roots

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American Roots Music on Record (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2018), 162-163, 170-172. Notions of age, experience and familiarity, however, were clearly linked to microphone fright. In the context of radio dramas, for example, the affliction was particularly noticeable for 'veteran' performers, or those with greater stage experience than younger newcomers to the entertainment industry: 'Even Veteran Actors Are Nervous When First Facing the Microphone', *Democrat and Chronicle* [Rochester, New York], 18 September 1927, 9.

[7] For Daddy Stovepipe's recording career, see Joseph Gustaitis, *Chicago Transformed: World War I and the Windy City* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2016), 239.

[8] 'New Gennett Records on Sale Today!', *Richmond Item* [Richmond, IN], 7 June 1924, 10.

[9] Katon was spelled 'Caton' on the 1920 census and often in print Howard Wight Marshall, *Play Me Something Quick and Devilish: Old-Time Fiddlers in Missouri* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2013), 174; *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* [MI], 12 April 1924, 24; *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* [MI], 22 December 1926, 45.

artists could break through onto radio and records, these were rare instances in comparison to the several examples of older white old-time acts cited in this chapter.

For all its cultural significances, old-time music on recordings and radio, ultimately, was about making money. At its core, this chapter argues that age was an important tool in the marketing of old-time music and the 'selling' of the South in the region and beyond. As such, while it primarily delivers valuable insight into the historically neglected experiences of older musicians, equally important subjects here are the producers, promoters, and other industry personnel of record labels and radio stations; the entrepreneurs, politicians and sponsors who wished to associate themselves to old musicians; and the diverse set of consumers - poor and wealthy, old and young, southern and nonsouthern, women and men - who enjoyed hearing old white southerners play old-time music. In doing so, this chapter shows the aged were used to sell ideas as well as products.

Veteran Fiddlers and Fiddling Veterans

For early radio producers, the popularity of old fiddlers' contests was an obvious format to replicate on-air, meaning many old musicians were broadcast over the new medium.[10] While not all competitors were old, many were. Many stations scheduled specific slots for 'Old-Time Fiddlers'; some, such as WFAA in Dallas, Texas, programmed 'Old Fiddlers' specifically.[11] In 1927, KUOA, a station owned by the University of Arkansas,

[10] Confusingly, but perhaps significantly, 'veteran fiddler' was a phrase commonly used to describe aged fiddlers, such as 'Uncle' Jimmy Thompson, who were not military veterans: 'WSM Plans For Week Announced', *Nashville Tennessean*, 2 May 1926, 5.
[11] *Radio World*, 5 April 1924, 22. A group called 'The Old-Time Fiddlers at WOS (Jefferson City, Missouri) were rated third best radio entertainers by *Radio World* in 1924. The same year, the Old-Time Fiddlers of Texas gave a concert over WBAP (Fort Worth, Texas). The Kentuckian group the Old-Time Fiddlers, played over WSAI (Cincinnati, Ohio) in 1931. By 1945, Old-Time Fiddlers was such a well-known category for rural radio it was included as a type of programming in an Agricultural Department questionnaire on the radio preferences of rural listeners: 'Snodgrass Leads in Popularity', *Radio World*, 3 May 1924, 14; *Radio Dial*, 23 May 1931, 7; *Broadcast Weekly*, 14 April 1929, 65; Bill Bailey, 'Farm Program Survey Stirs Stations', *Broadcasting*, 23 July 1945, 20.

held an on-air contest for 'All old fiddlers of Arkansas and neighboring states.'[12] On-air fiddle contests capitalised on regional rivalries and through postal voting encouraged the kind of active audience participation that sponsors craved to help sell their products.[13] The 'invisible' nature of radio complicated the fiddle contest format. Chicago's WLS reported that during one on-air contest, hometowns of contestants cheated by working together to copy hundreds of postal votes.[14] In February 1926, Tennessean fiddler Uncle Am Stuart defended his title of 'Champion Fiddler of the Middle Atlantic States' over WRC in Washington, D.C., in a 'blind' competition where contestants were introduced with a number and listeners voted for the winner while unaware of their ages. Significantly, even with this level-playing field the media focused on the old age of the winners. New York's *Evening Star* noted both the age of contestants (Stuart was 'a comparatively young fiddler, being only 72 years old'), and the music ('antedating the Spanish War').[15]

Record labels also caught onto the fiddle contest craze. A&R representatives 'discovered' elderly roots musicians through fiddlers' contests. For example, in one account of how Uncle Am Stuart came to record, an Aeolian-Vocalion Company representative happened to be at an old fiddlers' contest where Stuart was playing, and subsequently invited the old fiddler to record in New York.[16] Labels also peppered sketches of old fiddlers throughout the commercial graphics of their releases and promotional literature. A record sleeve produced for Vocalion's 1928 Old Southern Tunes Series features a cartoon of an

[12] 'Old Fiddlers Contest', *Madison County Record* [Huntsville, Arkansas], 17 February 1927, 2.
[13] In 1925, elderly fiddler Uncle Am Stuart participated in an 'old-time fiddling contest' over Atlanta's WSB that featured postal voting: *Courier-Journal* [Louisville, KY], 17 January 1925, 8.
[14] Milton Lieberman, 'Good Evening, Listening In With', *Radio Age*, November 1924, 38. In 1927, a fiddle contest broadcast from WNAX (Yankton, SD) over a total of 33 hours received over 8000 telegrams: *The WNAX Station Book* (Yankton, South Dakota: Gurney Seed and Nursery Company, 1929), 99.
[15] '"Uncle Am" Wins Fiddling Laurels', *Evening Star*, 14 February 1926, 37; 'Fiddling Contest Over WRC Tonight', *Evening Star*, 20 February 1926, 27.
[16] The representative was probably from Sterchi Brothers, a local furniture retailer and phonograph distributer: Archie Green, 'Commercial Music Graphics V', *JEMF Quarterly* 2 (June 1968), 39-40.

archetypal old fiddler with a lengthy goatee [Appendix 2.1].[17] Phonograph graphics built on a whole tradition of sheet-music and songbook artwork that also depicted pastoral scenes with old fiddlers. The cover of *Treasure Chest of Homespun Songs*, a 1935 songbook of old-time songs published by a New York song publishing company, features a painting of a rural scene with two grey-haired musicians playing fiddle and banjo for a family with children. Sat nearby appreciating the music is an old, bonnet-wearing woman with a blanket draped over her legs and a pipe. As publishers and labels of this era rarely spent money on visual advertising unless they thought such efforts would be effective, such seemingly random graphics suggest that the music industry was particularly keen to inscribe the image of the old fiddler onto their products.[18]

As with in-person fiddlers' contests, stations outside the South held on-air competitions with aged contestants. Boston's WBZ, for example, held a North Atlantic States competition in 1926.[19] A relatively transregional broadcast such as Chicago's *National Barn Dance* yoked regions into a single 'radio culture', but even it gravitated towards the rural South. The show claimed to feature 'the leading fiddlers and old time singers of Dixie and other sections', even though most of its old fiddlers were from Illinois.[20] In a similar vein, some pioneering producers of southern radio inspired the

[17] The sleeve likely dates to 1928 and is reprinted in Archie Green, 'Commercial Graphics XIII', *JEMF Quarterly* 6 (Spring 1970): 116-117.
[18] *Treasure Chest of Homespun Songs* (New York: Treasure Chest Publications, 1935), reprinted in Ronald D. Cohen and David Bonner, *Selling Folk Music: An Illustrated History* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2017), 27.
[19] '"Mellie", of Ford Fame, Would Find Plenty of Competition Here', *Omaha Evening Bee* [Omaha, Nebraska], 1 February 1926, 1; 'Ford Donates Cup for Champion Fiddler', *Evening Sun*, 6 March 1926. Radio stations across North America had their own fiddle programming. 'Old-Time Fiddlers' was the title of a slot over California stations KFOX (Long Beach) and KGEF (Los Angeles). Canadian radio station CFCY (Prince George's Island) had an old-time fiddler slot: Betty Rogers Large and Tom Crothers, *Out of Thin Air* (Charlottetown, Canada: Applecross Press, 1989); *Radio Doings*, 12 April 1930, 36. Northern radio stations faced issues that were different to their southern counterparts. In 1926, WOAW in Omaha, Nebraska, struggled to get octogenarian fiddlers to travel through the snow to the station: '"Mellie", of Ford Fame, Would Find Plenty of Competition Here', *Omaha Evening Bee* [Omaha, Nebraska], 1 February 1926, 1.
[20] The elderly Illinoisan fiddlers at WLS included Frank Hurt, William McCormack, and Tommy Dandurand: *WLS Family Album* (Chicago: Agricultural Broadcasting Company,

inclusion of older fiddlers at northern stations. When David Stone, coproducer of the *Grand Ole Opry*, left Nashville's WSM in 1940 to produce the *Sunset Valley Barn Dance* over KSTP in St. Paul, Minnesota, his first action was to put out requests for 'old-time fiddlers' to contact the station.[21]

Ultimately, the contrasting image of the old fiddler playing over radio became something of a national antimodernist icon in the 'jazz age'. Associated with this phenomenon was the idea that old listeners were particularly receptive to such programming. In 1927, *Radio Digest* explained the national fad for 'Grandad fiddlers' over radio by imagining a scene in which 'young flappers' were surprised to see their grandparents revitalised by the sounds of old fiddlers over the airwaves.[22] In trade journals, images of hearing-impaired elders (including Civil War veterans) listening contently to radio sets or phonograph players ensured potential consumers that the technologies produced hi-fidelity sound, but also exploited an old age imaginary to suggest that the modern media were not threats to traditional family values [Appendix 2.2 to 2.5].[23]

The Henry Ford-inspired revival of old fiddlers also reached the world of records and radio. The septuagenarian Mellie Dunham from Maine, for example, made several records for Victor in 1926. In 1926, Henry Ford's Old-Fashioned Orchestra, which did not feature Ford himself, made records and radio appearances.[24] For all Ford's support of old

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1930), 17. Paul L. Tyler, 'The Rise of Rural Rhythm' in *The Hayloft Gang: The Story of the National Barn Dance,* ed. Chad Berry (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 44.

[21] 'KSTP Sunset Valley Barn Dance', *Radio Varieties*, April 1941, 8.

[22] *Radio Digest* described a fictional scene in which 'Grandad, sitting in the big Turkish Chair looked up from his reading, beamed a juvenile smirk, placed his paper on the bookstand at his elbow and got to his feet with a jig pose. "Gee! That makes me feel young," he chortled': 'Old Style Dances Win Favor', *Radio Digest*, 13 February 1926, 5.

[23] 'Now Grannie Can Listen!', *Popular Wireless*, 27 November 1926, 726; 'Old Soldiers Listening To An Edison', *Edison Phonograph Monthly*, December 1913, 5; *Radio in the Home*, March 1926, 1; *Radio in the Home*, May 1926, 1.

[24] Tony Russell, *Country Music Records: A Discography, 1921-1942* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 326. The Old Time Orchestra recorded sixteen sides for Victor and Columbia between 1925 and 1926 and played over several radio stations during public showings of the new Ford automobiles. The Ford Motor Company's New York City branch broadcast music from their office. Hundreds of Ford dealers across the nation set up

fiddlers, the orchestra that bore his name did not permanently feature any aged fiddlers, but it did include Benjamin B. Lovett, an old dance teacher from New England. Lovett was driven by an intergenerationalist spirit: interviews with 'old-timers' informed his Ford-sponsored dance book, and the Orchestra took their dances to schools.[25] Importantly, Lovett took inspiration from old southern mountain people. In 1926, during the orchestra's stay in Greensboro, Lovett requested that the North Carolina School for Women take them the mountains to meet 'old-time fiddlers'.[26]

If stations across the country were broadcasting old fiddlers, they were particularly present at barn dance shows in the South and Midwest. The low fidelity of radio in the 1920s meant voices were hard for microphones to pick up, at least compared to the already scratchy sounds of fiddle instrumentals.[27] Older voices, if heard less, nevertheless added some authenticity to the 'dance' element of barn dance shows. In the apocryphal story of the first broadcast at WLS that inspired the creation of the *National Barn Dance*, requests came to the studio for a dance caller to accompany the fiddling. The announcer soon reported that Tom Owens, a 50-year-old hospital worker, 'telephoned that he used to call dances down home in Missouri and he'll be right over.'[28] Likely influenced by radio, record labels

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loudspeakers in their showrooms and invited townspeople to dance to the music: 'Concert Program, 'Tune in on Henry Ford's Old Fashioned Dance Orchestra, Broadcast from the Ford Exhibition, New York City,' The Henry Ford, available at www.thehenryford.org/collections-and-research/digital-collections/artifact/353685, accessed 1 August 2018.

[25] Revealingly, the title of Lovett's song and dance book referred to Rip Van Wrinkle: Benjamin Lovett, *Good Morning: After a Sleep of Twenty-Five Years Old-Fashioned Dancing Is Being Revived by Mr and Mrs. Henry Ford.* (Dearborn, Michigan: Dearborn Publishing Company, 1926); 'Letter from Highland Park High School Principal to Benjamin Lovett', 16 January 1926, The Henry Ford, available at www.thehenryford.org/collections-and-research/digital-collections/artifact/379852, accessed 1 August 2018.

[26] 'Letter from Benjamin Lovett to Mary Channing Coleman of the North Carolina College for Women', 2 May 1927, The Henry Ford, available at www.thehenryford.org/collections-and-research/digital-collections/artifact/399911, accessed 1 August 2018.

[27] For more on violin recordings in the acoustic recording era, see Mark Katz, *Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010), 93.

[28] George C. Biggar, 'The WLS National Barn Dance Story: The Early Years', *JEMF Quarterly* 6 (Autumn 1971): 105. The potential unreliability of this account is discussed in Paul L. Tyler, 'The Rise Of Rural Rhythm', in *The Hayloft Gang: The Story of the National*

produced phonograph records of barn dance tunes with calls, including some by Tom Owens WLS Barn Dance Trio and National Barn Dance Orchestra (also featuring Owens).[29] Just as the dance calls and associated vocabulary helped contextualise and geolocate the sounds over barn dance radio as 'rural' and region-specific music, Owens' own voice on records, such as 'Hell On the Wabash' (Gennett 3292) from 1926, is somewhat raspier and hoarser than a younger voice, and therefore helped temporise the predominantly instrumental music. That the record was rereleased by the Herwin label under the pseudonym Uncle John Harvey's Old Time Dance Orchestra (Herwin 75519), suggests the company made efforts to exaggerate Owens' age. As there is little evidence to suggest callers at barn dances tended to be older, it may have been the case that older callers could thrive on records and radio, as in the studio they merely had to stand nearer the microphone to be heard, whereas at a live event they had to raise their ageing, and presumably weaker voices above the din of the fiddlers and dancers.[30]

Confederate veteran reunions were another familiar and popular musical event with southern audiences that could be replicated over radio and on records. As with in-person fiddle contests, veterans on radio embodied a past that was starkly different, both visually and culturally, from the modern South. In 1925, the 83-year-old Confederate veteran 'Uncle'

Barn Dance, ed. Chad Berry (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 43-44. However, that the story quickly became part of the foundation story of the *National Barn Dance* is significant in itself.

[29] Phil Jamison has chronicled ninety recordings featuring southern callers between 1924-1933, at which time the Depression killed off what market there existed for the niche product: Phil Jamison, *Hoedowns, Reels, and Frolics: Roots and Branches of Southern Appalachian Dance* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 83. Like Owens, the first recorded barn dance caller, the 46-year-old 'Aunt' Samantha Bumgarner, called dances with an audibly mature voice, even if she was only middle-aged. However, there seems little indication that her records were advertised with any sense of agedness. The earliest use of her 'Aunt' moniker in print appears to be 1941: 'Picnic In Jackson Set For Saturday', *Asheville Citizen-Times* [North Carolina], 21 July 1941, 6.

[30] Phil Jamison argues that it is unlikely that barn dance recordings were used for dancing as most were are not in time with any known dance steps, the length of one side was not long enough to complete a full dance, and rural dances generally were regionally specific, meaning they were unintelligible to consumers from different regions. Jamison posits that the calls were intended merely to add a feeling of authenticity and rusticity: Phil Jamison, *Hoedowns, Reels, and Frolics*, 83.

George Sheram discussed over WLS how the fashionable bobbed haircuts for women were 'too mannish'. *Radio Digest* reported that Sheram 'appears fit and his kindly blue eyes sparkle with a light which makes a recital of his age appear anomalous. There is a surety to his tread which would do credit to even a much younger man, and his sense of the humorous and his mental process are still alert'. Paradoxically, alongside sentimental flattery about the Sheram's vigor, *Radio Digest* stressed Sheram's agedness, noting for example that he had a long beard and white hair.[31] Confederate veterans also found their way onto other new mass media of the day. Veterans were special guests at the premieres of blockbuster films about the South, including both *Birth Of A Nation* (1915) and *Gone With The Wind* (1939). The press questioned the relative 'authenticity' of both the cinematic depictions of the Old South.[32] Union veterans also appeared on new mass media, but Confederate veterans were intimately associated with music. When Captain James Dinks spoke over New Orleans radio to advertise a Louisiana reunion in 1923, he was accompanied by a quartet of Confederate veterans who sang Civil War songs with fife and drums. Dinks, like many who organised or reported on veterans on radio, was keen to stress that while the veterans were old, they were still comfortable with the modern world: 'Nothing but the most advanced methods of announcements would have served the aged soldiers', Dinks reportedly said on-air, 'whose ideas … are as progressive as those of the youngest recruit.'[33] With seeming ease, the bearers of Old South traditions were broadcasting over the ether of the New South.

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[31] Sheram, from Cogginsville, Georgia, spoke on WLS and other radio stations as he hiked from reunion to reunion. He even attempted, in vain, to secure a movie deal in Hollywood: 'Confederate Veteran Hiker', *Radio Digest*, 10 January 1925, 8. A similar story from 1936 involved a 93-year old confederate veteran who was invited as special guest for WRVA (Richmond, Virginia): 'Specials at WRVA', *Variety*, 1 April 1936, 44.

[32] 'Rebel Yell Adds Realism To The Birth Of A Nation', *Atlanta Constitution*, 14 December 1915, 14; 'Four Confederate Veterans Will Attend Premiere In Sunday Best - And An Actress Or Two May Get Kissed', *Atlanta Constitution*, 13 December 1939, 2. GAR veterans were also invited to comment on *Birth of a Nation*: Nick Sacco, 'Outrageous Inaccuracies: The Grand Army of the Republic Protests The Birth of a Nation', *Journal of the Civil War Era*, 14 November 2017, available at www.journalofthecivilwarera.org/2017/11/outrageous-inaccuracies-grand-army-republic-protests-birth-nation, accessed 31 July 2018.

[33] 'Invite Veterans to Reunion Over Ether', *Radio Digest*, 1923, 3.

Phonograph records were likewise seen as a way to disseminate, but also immortalise the sounds of the Confederacy.[34] In the early 1930s, the United Daughters of the Confederacy established the Committee to Secure a Phonograph Record of the Rebel Yell to Be Preserved to Posterity.[35] However, the authenticity of mediated rebel cries was hotly contested. Some believed that sanctity of the rebel yell was placed in jeopardy if performed on records or radio in peacetime. Aged veterans, it was believed, were also too physically feeble to muster the necessary spirit. *Radio Guide* noted in 1934 that a Confederate veteran from Mississippi wrote to an unspecified radio station to criticise the inauthenticity of an on-air rebel yell. Producers then located another veteran and brought him to the studio to make a phonograph recording of the 'real McCoy'.[36] Debate about the relative authenticity of rebel cries on radio or records helps explain the appeal of old fiddlers' contests: live, audiences could at least see and hear the elderly old veterans. Occasionally then, disembodied media such as radio or records were seen as questionable sources for age-based performances. However, generally speaking, record companies, radio stations, and their audiences embraced aged fiddlers and old age imaginaries, just as many elders actively engaged with the new technology.

[34] Edison cylinder recordings of veterans performing rebel yells were sold commercially: The Museum of the Confederacy have released a CD of veterans performing the rebel yell: *The Rebel Yell Lives!* (Museum of the Confederacy SKU: 413-1, n.d.) compact disc. In cinemas too, audiences could see veterans perform rebel yells. Smithsonian Magazine have published a 1930s news reel of veterans performing the rebel yell: 'What Did the Rebel Yell Sound Like?', *Smithsonian Magazine*, available at http://www.smithsonianmag.com/videos/category/history/what-did-the-rebel-yell-sound-like/, accessed 13 July 2017. For an example of such a recording, see also: 'Rebel Yell,' *26th Regiment North Carolina Troops*, accessed 7 August 2017, http://26nc.org/History/Rebel-Yell/Sound-Files/RebelYell_l.wav.

[35] Craig A. Warren, *The Rebel Yell: A Cultural History* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2014), 106-7.

[36] This exchange arose from the mixed-reviews of NBC's Civil War drama *Roses and Drums*: Henry Bentinck, 'Yesterday's Thunder', *Radio Guide*, 29 September 1934, 4.

Texas Pioneers: Capt. Moses Bonner and Uncle Henry Gilliland

Significantly, it was a fiddling Confederate veteran who played the first barn dance radio show. Most scholars consider WBAP (Fort Worth, Texas) one of, if not the first radio station to regularly schedule a dedicated barn dance programme. On 4 January 1923, WBAP broadcast a performance from Capt. Moses J. Bonner, a 76-year-old Confederate veteran and fiddler.[37] As well as a prominent competitor on fiddle contests circuits, Bonner was an active member of the R. E. Lee Camp of the United Confederate Veterans, and veteran pensions campaigner. A family photograph of him standing with his sons, then serving in the First World War, indicates he remained associated with the military long after his own service [Appendix 2.6].[38] The social networks established from veteran and fiddling circles made Bonner a useful resource for WBAP. By 1925, WBAP was listing Capt. Bonner's Old-Time Fiddlers on their schedules, suggesting that he brought some of fiddlers with him onto radio.[39] The regular use of his military title in print and on the discs of his recordings indicates that veteranhood was a significant dimension of his celebrity. A 1925 advertisement from a Weatherford, Texas record retailer read simply 'Old Fiddler Records By Capt. Mose [sic] Bonner'.[40]

If Bonner's military credentials made him an attractive star of the burgeoning old-time genre in a period of nostalgia for the Confederacy and the Old South, his music also echoed some of the contemporary political tensions over veteranhood. The second tune of a medley of instrumental fiddle breakdowns Bonner recorded in 1925, 'Dusty Miller/Ma Ferguson' (Victor 19699), was titled in tribute to the first female governor of Texas,

[37] For more detail on Bonner's broadcast, see Malone and Laird, *Country Music USA*, 40. Bonner's success appears to have influenced the station to book more old-time acts. Just a few weeks after Bonner debuted, E. J. Jenkins performed 'old time tunes' on his fiddle: 'WBAP Radio Program', *Tulia Herald* [Tulia, Texas], 26 January 1923, 10.
[38] Photograph reprinted in Ronald S. Coddington, 'Blue, Gray and Khaki', *Military Images* 35, no. 4 (2017): 16-26.
[39] *Tampa Bay Times* [St. Petersburg, Florida], 11 February 1925, 40.
[40] 'Old Fiddler Records By Capt. Mose Bonner', *Granbury News* [Granbury, Texas], 31 July 1925, 5.

Democrat Miriam 'Ma' Ferguson. During her gubernatorial campaign, several Democrat voters switched their vote to Republican candidate Dr. George C. Butte on both sexist grounds and in protest to the open influence of her husband, James E. Ferguson, who had been impeached during his tenure as Governor a few years earlier. For the media, the switching of Confederate veterans, most of whom had been life-long Democrats, to the Republican ticket became a barometer for the supposed political realignment caused by the Ferguson campaign. One self-described 'Woman Democrat', rationalised her switch to the party of Abraham Lincoln in the letter pages of the *Houston Post* by looking to

> the Confederate veterans occupying front seats at gatherings to hear Dr. Butte. If there is any body of men who would despise the camp followers after the Civil War it is these men. But they are enthusiastically for him because they know he loves Texas and would make an excellent governor.[41]

Colonel R. B. Creager, the Republican National Committeeman from Texas and campaigner for President Coolidge, predicted ambitiously, if erroneously, that several hundreds of Confederate veterans would desert their old Democrat moorings prompting a Republican takeover of the Lone Star State.[42]

Several Confederate veterans publicly expressed publicly their own dismay at the wayward Democrats. One 83-year-old veteran who had returned from the Civil War 'on crutches, penniless and a cripple', was 'born and reared a democratic', and had fought against the 'carpetbag' rule for decades, wrote to the *Houston Post* to explain how the lack of 'principle, honor and integrity' in Texan politics caused him to break his lifetime loyalty to the Democrats by voting for Butte.[43] In this wider context, Capt. Bonner's musical dedication to Ferguson can be read as a cultural manifestation of the wider divisions, partly along generational lines, amongst Texan Democrats. Whether Ferguson was aware of Bonner or the record, or whether her team were connected to Bonner, remains unknown,

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[41] 'Post-Dispatch Contributors Think Of Fergusonism', *Houston Post*, 2 November 1924, 37.
[42] 'Creager Forecasts Big Gains in Texas', *Whitewright Sun* [Whitewright, Texas], 23 October 1924, 3.
[43] 'Old Confederate For Butte', *Houston Post*, 21 October 1924, 6.

although it would have made sense for them to reach out to a veteran as part of a counter-campaign against the image of other veterans deserting her party.[44] Ferguson, after all, went by the nickname 'Ma' (actually an acronym of her first and middle names), and promoted an image of her own seniority and motherhood. It is equally possible that Bonner titled his fiddle instrumental as an albeit simple satire *against* Ferguson and what she represented. Whatever the case, as a piece of musical commentary, Bonner's 'Ma Ferguson' opens up a window into underlying tensions over the political uses of aged veterans in Texas in the early 1920s.

Aside from his role as veteran and fiddle competitor, Bonner also had ties to another local institution that, ironically, Ferguson had campaigned to eradicate. In 1938, Bonner told a Federal Writers' Project interviewer that during Reconstruction he had led his local chapter of the Ku Klux Klan into violent confrontations with blacks in Dallas County, and marched at the front of one hundred armed Klansmen from Dallas to Austin to ensure newly elected Democrat Richard Coke was properly seated as governor and the 'carpetbagger' E. J. Davis removed.[45] The resurgence of the Klan in Fort Worth in the 1920s was gradual, but signalled publicly in the summer of 1922 by a 6000-strong initiation ceremony a few miles out of town. Though no direct evidence connects Bonner to the next generation of Klansmen, it is reasonable to suggest that some of the local population may have recognised Bonner as part of that milieu, or even viewed him as a living embodiment of the movement's heritage.[46]

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[44] Ferguson's campaign manager Homer T. Brannon hailed from Fort Worth, so it is possible that there may have been a connection between the two: Carol O'Keefe Wilson, *In the Governor's Shadow: The True Story of Ma and Pa Ferguson* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2014).

[45] Interview with Maj. M. J. Bonner, 7 June 1938, Federal Writers' Project, Fort Worth & Tarrant County, Vol. 2, 444-451, available at www.fortworthtexasarchives.org/digital/collection/p16084coll1/id/55/rec/13, accessed 20 November 2018. For conflict between Ferguson and the Klan, see Carol O'Keefe Wilson, *In the Governor's Shadow*, 145-156.

[46] Klan intergenerationalism is an underdeveloped field of research, with most attention on the topic given to Klan chapters outside the South and their activities during the 1950s and 1960s: David Cunningham, 'Paths to Participation: A Profile of the Civil Rights-Era Ku Klux Klan', in *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change*, Vol. 27, (Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2007), 283-308; Emeka Aniagolu, *Co-Whites: How*

WBAP, however, was anything but a Klan propagandist station. The *Fort Worth Star Telegram,* which owned the station, was keen to present Fort Worth as a modern city that was open for northern investment. In 1923, the newspaper adopted the slogan 'Where The West Begins' to give out-of-state investors the impression that the town was 'western' rather than 'southern', following another summer of white-on-black violence.[47] In this context, Bonner's seniority served a dual function: it pleased listeners sympathetic to the idea of a 'tradition' built on white supremacist and nativist ideology, but also diluted any immediate sense of violence. For all the talk of 'rejuvenated' old fiddlers, the septuagenarian Bonner was still seen as too old and weak to still be leading a crowd of Klansmen through the streets of Fort Worth.

In the 1920s, Fort Worthians may have known Bonner as an aged representative of the Confederacy, fiddlers' contests, or white supremacist organisations. Photographs in the local press of the long-bearded, grizzled fiddler wearing military medals visually bore-out any of these identities [Appendix 2.7].[48] However, the reality was far more complex: Bonner led another life as secretary and treasurer for an oil company during the North Texas oil boom in the late 1910s.[49] At an old fiddlers' contest in Mexia in 1922, Democrats, Republicans and railway owners entertained a party of northern businessmen interested in investing in Texan oil. The guests were given a Texan welcome, including 'old time dances' played by Bonner.[50] This image of Bonner as an 'oilman' ushering in the modern Texan

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and Why White Women 'Betrayed' the Struggle for Racial Equality in the United States (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2012), 212; JoEllen M. Vinyard, *Right in Michigan's Grassroots: From the KKK to the Michigan Militia* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 55.

[47] David R. Stokes, *The Shooting Salvationist: J. Frank Norris and the Murder Trial That Captivated America* (Hanover, New Hampshire: Steerforth Press, 2011), 60-61.

[48] *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, 12 February 1923, 9.

[49] Bonner was secretary and treasurer for M. K. & T. Oil Refining Stock: *Daily Herald* [Weatherford, Texas], 29 January 1919, 2; 'M., K. & T. Oil & Refining Co.', *Waco News-Tribute* [TX], 19 January 1919, 23.

[50] The party included the Democrat Governor for Colorado, Charles S. Thomas, General John J. Pershing, President J. E. Gorman of the Rock Island railroad company, and Charles G. Dawes, then Director of the Bureau of the Budget: 'Pershing Visits Mexia Oil Fields: Hears Old Fiddlers Play,' *Temple Daily Telegram* [TX], 6 January 1922, 1.

economy has never figured into country music histories. Instead, historians represent Bonner as an old, rural fiddler who stumbles, almost by accident, into a modern broadcasting studio.[51] Yet this same Bonner, despite being born before the invention of the electric grid, was not timid about reaping the spoils of the technology driven oil extraction industry. Ironically, the oil industry, of which Bonner was part, was responsible for many of the rapid cultural changes in Texas in the 1920s that made his antimodernist musical persona so appealing. The oil boom turned Fort Worth into one of the fastest growing cities in the nation, filled with urban living, cars, railways, and migrant workers.[52] Ultimately, the rural-orientated WBAP, one of the first stations to broadcast livestock and crop notices, and ring a cowbell as an 'audio logo', and record labels experimenting in old-time music, required the Bonner who performed songs with titles such as 'Yearling's In the Cranebrake' (Victor 19699); not the Bonner who benefitted from a modern industry that was reshaping both the natural and cultural landscape.

Another tension in Bonner's career was more aesthetic. Testament to WBAP's cognisance of its diverse listenership, the station hired Wagoner's Hilo Five Hawaiian Orchestra as Bonner's backing band. Borrowing from the vaudevillian 'variety' format, early radio producers regularly mixed together aged old-time musicians and 'novelty' or 'exotic' acts. The spectacle of 'Hawaiian' music was one of numerous 'modern desires' of the imperialist US in the early twentieth century. For many actual and aspiring middle-class Americans, enjoying Hawaiian music signified their cosmopolitan identity.[53] Later on, Bonner's on-air act was billed as Capt. Bonner's Old-time Square Dance Orchestra,

[51] E.g. Bill C. Malone, *Don't Get Above Your Raisin': Country Music and the Southern Working Class* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 158.
[52] For anti-oil movements and a sense of antimodernism in Texas during these years, see Roger M. Olien and Diana Davids Olien, *Oil and Ideology: The Cultural Creation of the American Petroleum Industry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 141-162.
[53] The idea of Hawaiian music and dance as a 'modern desire' in the mainland US dates back to before the annexation of Hawai'i in 1898, and is discussed in Adria L. Imada, *Aloha America: Hula Circuits through the U.S. Empire* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 59-63.

combining 'high' and 'low' art in one group name.[54] An aged fiddler fronting an orchestra, Hawaiian or otherwise, gave the impression that WBAP was a high-class 'New South' institution, even up-to-date with the exotic trends of the day, yet concurrently deferential to elders and regional traditions.

As was the case with broadcast old-time music, it is rarely acknowledged that a key player at the 'beginning' of recorded old-time music was an old Confederate veteran. On 30 June 1922, Victor recorded an intergenerational fiddle duo: the 77-year-old 'Uncle' Henry C. Gilliland and 35-year-old Alexander Campbell 'Eck' Robertson. These recordings were made before Fiddlin' John Carson's path-breaking recording of 'The Little Log Cabin in the Lane' (OKeh 4890) in June 1923, a record that historians consider the first song to be marketed as an old-time record. The Gilliland/Robertson duets were shelved until after the success of Carson's records proved to labels the marketability of southern white roots music.[55] Gilliland, born in Missouri and raised in Parker County, Texas, had fought Yankees in the Civil War and Native Americans during westward expansion, before serving as court clerk and Justice of the Peace in his later years. Robertson was a talented fiddler and son of a veteran, and well regarded at reunions and contests across the South, where he likely first met Gilliland. Following a reunion in Richmond, Virginia in 1922, where their duets supposedly caused attending veterans to dance the 'shake down', the pair made the decision to travel to New York to try their luck as recording artists.[56] Contrary to what might be expected, it was the older Gilliland, rather than the younger Robertson, who secured their session. Gilliland was acquainted with Martin W. Littleton, a renowned lawyer who had

[54] 'Today's Programs', *St. Louis Star* [St. Louis, Missouri], 14 June 1923, 10.
[55] For the events surrounding Carson's undoubtedly influential, if not entirely ground-breaking Okeh recordings, see Archie Green, 'Hillbilly Music: Source and Symbol', *Journal of American Folklore* 78, no. 309 (1965): 204-228; Karl Hagstrom Miller, *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 201-204.
[56] The next day the *Richmond News Leader* in Virginia printed photographs of the generation-spanning pair on its frontpage: *Richmond News Leader,* 21 June 1922, 1.

worked briefly with Gilliland in Weatherford, and who happened to represent Victor. The older performer therefore benefited from social networks cultivated over a long lifetime.[57]

It is important to recognise Gilliland's agency in getting recorded, as opposed to the common interpretation of the time and since that Gilliland was *asked* to record. *Confederate Veteran* magazine, for example, claimed in his obituary that Gilliland was 'considered the best 'fiddler' of the world' and so 'called to New York City to record'.[58] This trope that old-time musicians, and particularly elderly ones, were uninterested in profit or celebrity, does not necessarily fit with Gilliland's story. Indeed, taking consideration of his age reframes his decision to record as a logical one. While living in Oklahoma in 1912, Gilliland lost his bid to clerkship of the district court against female candidate Maude Kimbell. Gilliland petitioned to annul the election solely on the basis that his opponent was a woman, even appealing the decision to the Oklahoma Supreme Court.[59] For an old man who had seen over his long lifetime every gradual step of women into the Texan and Oklahoman public spheres, not least the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in the two states in 1919 and 1920, a late-life career move into recorded old-time music, where both his age and male authority might be valued, was a 'rational' decision.[60]

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[57] The *Vernon Record*, the newspaper for Robertson's hometown., Vernon, Texas, reported that Robertson told 'the manager of the [Victor] studio that he wanted to "do" a record or two for Victor patrons.' As such it is not entirely clear which of the pair was the driving force behind the recording, although it is plausible that the *Vernon Record* was somewhat biased in emphasising Robertson's role: 'Vernon Fiddler Fiddles Way Into Hearts Of Gotham', *Vernon Record*, 14 July 1922, 1.

[58] 'Col. Henry C. Gilliland', *Confederate Veteran*, April 1925, 145.

[59] Petition to Honorable Frank Matthews, Judge of the 25th Judicial District, Jackson County, Oklahoma from Henry C. Gilliland, 17 September 1912, in *Gilliland v. Whittle et al*, Supreme Court of Oklahoma, 127 Pac. 698; 33 OK 708 (1912).

[60] Texas was the ninth state in the nation to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment, and the first in an otherwise hostile South to do so. The suffrage movement in Texas and Oklahoma also built on decades of gradual advances by mostly white Texan and Oklahoman women into the public sphere, whether as phone operators, teachers, or political organisers: Judith N. McArthur and Harold L. Smith, *Texas Through Women's Eyes: The Twentieth-Century Experience* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 55. Suzanne H. Schrems, *Who's Rocking the Cradle?: Women Pioneers of Oklahoma Politics from Socialism to the KKK, 1900-1930* (Norman, Oklahoma: Horse Creek Publications, 2004), 1-10.

Age was also an important context in the actual production of the duets Gilliland and Robertson recorded. With regards to repertoire, either musician may have chosen to record the immensely popular folk tale-cum-fiddle showpiece 'Arkansaw Traveler' (Victor 18956). Equally, producers may have chosen the song, or at least picked it for release, because of its already established popularity with audiences in the region. The song was popular with veteran communities: Gilliland played the song at United Confederate Veterans events in Oklahoma and Tennessee in 1921.[61] Although their recorded version was instrumental, many record buyers would have been familiar with the aged protagonist of the song's lyrics, an old 'hillbilly' who cunningly runs rings around an out-of-state visitor, and potentially connected them to artist name printed on the record's label: 'Uncle Henry'.

Robertson went on to record six more sides without Gilliland, replacing him with A&R man Nat Shilkret accompanying on piano. While it was common for label personnel to play on the roots music they produced, it is unclear whether Gilliland simply had other plans, or whether age-related issues pushed him out of the session. The tunes Robertson recorded the next day featured a much broader range of contemporary popular music. Victor was willing enough to break convention by recording some vernacular fiddling, but it was still cautious enough to 'bank' some recordings of popular standards. It is certainly plausible that someone of Gilliland's generation would have been less aware of or willing to play modern tunes.

It is equally likely, however, that Gilliland's small recorded output was due to his physical condition. Few fiddlers or musicologists would compare Gilliland's playing favourably to the fast, intricate, and clear playing Robertson ably demonstrated the

[61] Years later, Robertson recalled how Victor staff typically would listen to a series of songs from him and then choose which ones suited their upcoming catalogue: Earl V. Spielman, 'An Interview with Eck Robertson', *JEMF Quarterly* 28 (Winter 1972): 179-187; 'Minutes Of The Annual Reunion Of U.C. Veterans', *Altus Times-Democrat* [Altus, OK), 9 June 1921, 9; Henry C. Gilliland, 'Chattanooga', *Altus Times-Democrat* [Altus, OK], 3 November 1921, 10;

following day on his much-lauded performance of 'Sallie Gooden' (Victor 18956).[62] Gilliland bore the injuries and wounds from a lifetime of fighting in what he described in his autobiography as the 'Wars of the Confederacy, Wars with the Indians, and Wars with the Fiddle and Bow'.[63] In 1899, the State of Texas rejected his pension application, despite his claim that he could no longer fulfil his then primary occupation of farming due to 'Physical disability, resulting from lameness in right leg and hip'. The application was rejected because Gilliland owned too much land, even though he claimed that his 111 acres was worthless due to the meagre quality of the soil. Again, the choice of music-making as a route to financial security may have been a pragmatic one for the ageing veteran.[64] Gilliland's 'Exceedingly bad' condition, caused by 'Exposure and doing heavy patrol duty' during the Civil War, seemingly worsened with age. In 1921, Gilliland travelled to Mineral Wells, Texas, to soothe his rheumatism in the town's 'healing waters'. In 1924 he passed away after suffering a 'long illness'.[65] With this medical background in mind, it is remarkable that the septuagenarian was able to travel over 300 miles from Richmond to New York, and understandable why he recorded so little.

Victor began advertising their recordings around March 1923, after Carson's record opened up the old-time market. An initial *Talking Machine World* advertisement did not

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[62] Robertson's volume was particularly significant in the context of acoustic recording. As Mark Katz demonstrates in the context of classical violinists on acoustic recordings, recording artists had to either 'play as close as possible to the horn without risking hitting it and thus ruining the take or play at a comfortable distance and risk being inaudible': Mark Katz, *Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010), 93.

[63] Gilliland, *Life and Battles of Henry C. Gilliland For Seventy Years: Wars of the Confederacy, Wars with the Indians and Wars with the 'Fiddle and Bow'* (Altus, Oklahoma: n.p., 1915). Gilliland was keen to publicise his own memories. When he went to reunions he wrote summaries of the events, his recollections of the war, and chapters of Civil War history for local newspapers: Henry C. Gilliland, 'Gilliland Tells What Vets Doing At The Reunion', *Altus Times-Democrat* [Altus, OK], 29 June 1922, 2.

[64] Fontenot, 'Country Music's Confederate Grandfather', 189-204.

[65] Henry C. Gilliland, 'Letter From "Uncle Henry"', *Altus Times-Democrat*, 30 June 1921, 5; 'Col. Henry C. Gilliland', *Confederate Veteran*, April 1925, 145. The wells in Mineral Wells were part of a wider network of 'fountains of youth' in Texas during this same period: Janet Mace Valenza, *Taking the Waters in Texas: Springs, Spas, and Fountains of Youth* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010).

mention Gilliland's age, but helped established the myth that two brash, rural southerners entered the recording world with little coherent plan in mind: 'two Southwesterners blew into our laboratory and told us they could play the fiddle.'[66] The advertisement is notable for its lack of hillbilly or rural nomenclature, but it at least did portray them as 'outsiders'. As Archie Green has argued, it took Victor some months from that point to understand 'the importance of old-time music as a distinct and lucrative marketable commodity'.[67] As Victor incrementally rusticated its marketing campaign in the year following the Robertson/Gilliland release it also added a sense of generationalism to its advertisements, as seen in a Victor supplement from November 1923:

> Two old-fashioned dance numbers by genuine cowboy fiddlers. Theirs is genuine American, not hybrid, music. You will find such musicians, today, only in out-of-the-way places. These two play old-style tunes, without accompaniment, with an occasional weird 'second part' in double-stops. The young generation will enjoy their nimble-footed style; the elder, perhaps hear them with mixed feelings.[68]

While the stereotyping of youth as dance fans was hardly unusual, the 'mixed feelings' of the older listeners is curious, implying either that they responded to the music with a melancholia for their lost youth or that they were morally concerned about the dancing. Whatever the intention, the pamphlet suggests Victor had begun pigeon-holing consumers into 'young' and 'elder', while simultaneously promoting the cross-generational appeal of the music, not unlike the way labels established the racialised boundaries of race and old-time releases, while sometimes concurrently crossing those artificial borders by advertising the cross-racial appeal of acts.[69]

An abstract sense of 'old America' and the 'old Southwest' permeated the promotion of the duo. A Victor pamphlet from 1924 highlighted the 'American' (likely

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[66] New Victor Records monthly supplement, April 1923, reprinted in Archie Green, 'Commercial Music Graphics XIII', *JEMF Quarterly* 6 (Summer 1970): 71-73.
[67] Ibid.
[68] New Victor Records monthly supplement, November 1923, reprinted in Archie Green, 'Commercial Music Graphics XIII', *JEMF Quarterly* 6 (Summer 1970): 72.
[69] Miller, *Segregating Sound*, 187-195; Ward and Huber, *A&R Pioneers*, 218-227.

meaning 'white-Anglo') provenance of their music: 'old American country dances … played in the traditional fashion of the American country fiddler, without accompaniment.'[70] In promotional photographs of the fiddlers, Robertson is dressed in cowboy attire, while Gilliland appeared the picture of dignified middle-class respectability in suit and bowtie. Bonner's senior age legitimised Bonner as an authentic 'westerner', whereas Robertson required a westernised outfit. In a 1924 Victor brochure that used these images, the copy described how the pair had lived 'rough and interesting lives in the Great West' and arrived at the studios in 'the garb of Western plainsmen.'[71]

While Victor distributed its records nationally, Gilliland's agedness resonated at a local level. In Gilliland's old stomping ground of Weatherford, a furniture store and Victrola dealer advertised their records in the local newspaper, declaring proudly that the two were 'Parker County men', with special reference to 'Uncle Henry'.[72] Similarly, the *Weekly Herald* in Parker County reported on the return of 'Uncle Henry' from his adventures recording in New York that the 77-years-old 'does not appear to be a year over 50. He is bright of eye and steady of hand … [and maintains] a youthful vigor.'[73] The *Hollis Post-Herald*, based in Gilliland's latter-day home of Altus, Oklahoma, described the duo as 'foremost exponents of Southwestern Fiddlers technique [and] heroes of many a hoe-down … For the first time real old fiddlers' music has been given recognition as an art'.[74] For these hometown media outlets, Gilliland became a bearer of a marginalised vernacular art form.

The supposed 'durability' of music put onto records added an existential meaning to the recordings of aged musicians like Gilliland who died not long after going into the

[70] Victor brochure, October 1924, reprinted in Archie Green, 'Commercial Graphics XX'. *JEMF Quarterly* 8 (Spring 1972): 25-27.
[71] Brochure reprinted Russell, *Country Music Originals*, 1.
[72] 'New Victor Records', *Daily Herald* [Weatherford, TX], 30 November 1923, 30.
[73] 'Old Time Fiddler of Parker County Pays Visit', *Weekly Herald* [Weatherford, TX], 7 September 1922, 6.
[74] '"Arkansaw Traveler" Is Now World Music', *Hollis Post-Herald* [Hollis, OK], 12 April 1923, 1.

studio.[75] The veteran community treasured Gilliland's Victor recordings. *Confederate Veteran* magazine was thankful to the company for the fact the music of a veteran was 'thus reproduced everywhere'.[76] For these veterans, Gilliland's records preserved a sound of the Confederacy that would help its spirit live on, but they also immortalised an older veteran who had cared for fellow aged ex-soldiers. Since the early 1900s, Gilliland had campaigned for better pension rights for veterans, even taking out advertisements offering to help those in need of help sourcing the necessary proofs to make their claims.[77] Over a decade after his Gilliland's death, Gene Baker from Wink, Texas penned a poem entitled 'When Uncle Henry Played' that was printed in the local press. Baker longed to see the 'old violin case and violin, and an old rawhide bottom chair' and hear the 'melody we hear no more'. Reflecting some of the distinctive ethnic diversity of the southwestern context, Baker's elegy involves him hearing a broadcast from a border radio station that spurred memories of Gilliland: 'I 'steale a taste of exquisite sweetness rendered as those Spanish can. It was a waltz so softly blended, was it real or only a dream? Ah! My radio caught me blissfully sleeping to Uncle Henry's Gilliland's violin.'[78]

Both Bonner and Gilliland were pioneers of broadcast and recorded old-time music. Their careers are emblematic of a wider story of how old fiddlers' contests and Confederate veteran culture crossed over into the new mass media of the 1920s, but also how age could feed into the disruptive politics of veteranhood, gender, race, and commerce in the early twentieth century South (and Southwest), sometimes in quite contradictory ways. Most significantly, features of modernity, whether oil wealth or the ability of records to freeze in

[75] For understandings of the 'durability' of the phonograph as a central part of its appeal, see Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 299.
[76] 'Col. Henry C. Gilliland', *Confederate Veteran,* April 1925, 145.
[77] Gilliland wrote numerous times to *Confederate Veteran* on behalf of other veterans in need of evidence of their time in service, for example in *Confederate Veteran,* January 1915, 286. For more detail on Gilliland's work with veterans, see Kevin S. Fontenot, 'Country Music's Confederate Grandfather', in *Country Music Annual 2001,* ed. Charles K Wolfe and James E. Akenson (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001), 196.
[78] 'When Uncle Henry Played', *El Paso Herald-Post,* 2 January 1934, 4.

time the performance of an aged, soon-to-be deceased performer, undergirded the careers of these two elderly southwestern fiddlers.

The Grand Ole Opry: Uncle Jimmy Thompson and Uncle Dave Macon

As the careers of Bonner and Gilliland's careers exemplify, the stories surrounding the interaction between aged fiddlers and the new technologies of records and radio have been vital touchstones of the 'country music tradition'.[79] Nowhere is this more obvious than the origin story of the *Grand Ole Opry*, a radio and stage show that from the mid-1920s to the 1940s gradually positioned itself as the preeminent country music institution. On 28 November 1925, George Hay, a relatively new announcer and producer at Nashville's WSM, departed from station's usual light music programming by broadcasting the septuagenarian Jesse Donald Thompson, or 'Uncle Jimmy', a white-bearded septuagenarian fiddler who for over two hours dazzled listeners across the nation with his rural fiddling and old-fashioned character. After receiving thousands of fan letters from listeners praising the broadcast, Hay rebooked Thompson and rebranded the Saturday night programme *WSM Barn Dance*, thus creating the show that would officially become the *Grand Ole Opry* in 1927. The event has become a foundational myth of country music, with recycled images and synopses republished in almost every history of country music and known to almost any reasonably studied fan. While scholars have deflated the mythology surrounding the event, few have unpacked the central role of age to the event and the narratives surrounding it.[80]

[79] For the construction of a country music tradition, see Richard A. Peterson, *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 223-225.

[80] Charles Wolfe, for example, has shown that Hay and other producers had already instigated rural-orientated radio programming and broadcast old-time music before Thompson came to WSM: Charles Wolfe, *A Good-Natured Riot: The Birth of the Grand Ole Opry* (Nashville: Country Music Foundation Press and Vanderbilt University Press, 1999), 4.

Several stories account for how Thompson came to fiddle before a WSM microphone, but the most believable version suggests his niece, Eva Thompson, who worked for the station recommended him to George Hay, who was on the look-out for rural entertainment to match that he had been involved with at WLS's *National Barn Dance* in Chicago. As with Gilliland, the romanticised image in some country music journalism, scholarship, and fandom of Uncle Jimmy as a bewildered old man who stumbled, almost by accident, into the studio, does not reflect the fact that Thompson was already fascinated with recorded and broadcast sound. Reportedly, the farmer had once paid for a homemade phonograph recording of his playing. His descendants recall that he had a strong ambition to be on the airwaves, so he could be heard across the nation, what he called 'the Americee'.[81] Thompson seemingly was not averse to incorporating some of the features of radio culture into his live performance. At a concert in Clarksville, Tennessee, a few months after his WSM debut, Thompson was accompanied onstage by a compere who was described by the local media as a kind of 'radio host'.[82]

Thompson was not the 'premodern' man his legend would suggest, but efforts were made to make him appear older than he was. There was considerable confusion surrounding Thompson's chronological age. Different media outlets, Hay, and Thompson himself gave different ages for the fiddler in 1925, ranging from 77 to 100 years old.[83] Yet, as Tony Russell has discovered, Thompson's birth certificate states he was 72 years old in 1925, likely meaning that someone added a few extra years to his age to present him as an

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[81] Charles Wolfe, *A Good-Natured Riot,* 76.
[82] 'Uncle Jimmy Thompson: Uncle Jimmy Is A Favorite Here', *Leaf Chronicle* [Clarksville, Tennessee], 4 March 1926, 3.
[83] A press release from one month after the broadcast stated that Thompson was 82 years old: 'WSM to Feature Old-Time Tunes', *Nashville Tennessean*, 27 December 1925, 17; 'Uncle Jimmy Thompson at WSM', *Radio Digest*, 9 January 1926. One newspaper reported falsely that Thompson was soon to celebrate his hundredth birthday: 'Around The Dial,' *Wilkes-Barre Record* [Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania], 22 November 1926, 11. In 1945, Hay recollected that Thompson had told listeners during his first broadcast that he was 'past eighty years of age': George D. Hay, *The Story of the Grand Ole Opry* (Nashville: WSM, 1945), 1. In a 1930 recording, Thompson himself claimed he was 82 years old (making him around 77 years old at the time of his first broadcast): Uncle Jimmy Thompson, *Lynchburg* (Vocalion 5456).

octogenarian. The exaggeration of his age, Russell suggests, was a concerted media strategy to give Thompson 'clear seniority' over a rival fiddler, the 72-year-old Mellie Dunham from Maine, who was then receiving national attention thanks to the patronage of Henry Ford.[84] Shortly after Thompson's radio success the press stoked up enthusiasm for a competition between Dunham and Thompson (which, incidentally, never materialised). What may seem a negligible difference in age between the fiddlers added some comedic drama to the prospective titanic battle. The *Nashville Tennessean* reported that:

> through careful diplomatic handling of the situation civil war may be averted but, nevertheless the fact remains that the honor of the South, and of Tennessee especially, has been assailed … It may be that Mellie's effrontery grows out of the natural impulsiveness of youth. He is a mere inexperienced stripling of around seventy, whereas Uncle Jimmy is a mature and experienced wielder of the bow and in the prime of his manhood at the age of eighty-three … it is always wise to curb these over-ambitious youngsters and show them their place. Uncle Jimmy was playing the fiddle when Mellie was learning to make snowshoes.[85]

Age then was a flexible but potent force in the press surrounding radio fiddlers, sometimes to the point of absurdity. On hearing of the proposed on-air fiddle contest between Thompson and Dunham, one Nashville resident wrote to WSM to offer Thompson their 264-year-old violin, assumedly because the greater age of the fiddle, like that of the fiddler, added a certain antiquarian timbre or 'grain' to Thompson's playing that would aid him in his 'fight'.[86]

Ultimately, it is unlikely that Thompson alone was responsible for 'fiddling' his age. Hay and the press clearly kept up the idea that Thompson was older than he was. Thompson,

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[84] Tony Russell, ''How Old Are You, Uncle Jimmy?': The Fiddler Who Fiddled With His Birthdate', *Old Time Herald* 14, no. 4 (2016). National newspapers reported on the rivalry between the pair: 'Rival Fiddlers In Lists: Radio Fans to Decide Between Maine and Tennessee Champions.', *New York Times*, 4 January 1926, 2; *Atlanta Constitution*, 7 February 1926, 4.

[85] 'The South's Honor Assailed', *Nashville Tennessean*, 5 January 1926, 4.

[86] '264-Year-Old Fiddle Offered For Contest', *Nashville Tennessean*, 10 January 1926, 2. On reading this letter, another resident offered a fiddle that was 420 years old: 'Canada Applauds WSM Barn Dance Program', *Nashville Tennessean*, 17 January 1926, 44. For the concept of the 'grain' of instrumental performance, see Roland Barthes, 'The Grain of the Voice', in *Image-Music-Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 188–89.

meanwhile, may not have known his exact age, and simply guessed it when asked by Hay or journalists. The practice of 'age-heaping' (when an age is rounded up or down) was common amongst people of Thompson's social class and generation.[87] Whatever Thompson's chronological age, or whoever was responsible for adding to it, the fact it was mentioned so often shows how central it was to his celebrity.

The number of years lived was just one way that Thompson's agedness was highlighted. The *Nashville Tennessean* repeatedly reported that Thompson told listeners he knew over 375 songs, or at least 'enough old-time tunes to play all night without repeating a single selection'.[88] In his 1945 account, Hay raised the figure to an improbable 'thousand tunes'.[89] As significant as the quantity of his songs was their antiquity. In January 1926, the *Tennessean* wrote that while 'Any tune seemed to do' when Thompson played, it was 'all the better if it was bearded with age'.[90] In reality, however, Thompson performed more than just old tunes. Lists of his repertoire, collated by his niece and accompanist, demonstrate that he mostly performed parlour and vaudeville songs composed in the early twentieth century.[91] If it was important for publicity purposes to exaggerate the antiquity and size of his repertoire, a fine balance also had to be struck: Thompson needed to be 'old' enough to have learnt so many old songs, but not senile enough that he had could not remember them.

Thompson's agedness was tethered to his southern identity. On 'Uncle Jimmy's Favorite Fiddling Pieces' (Vocalion 5456), a 1930 record that imitated a radio broadcast, including dialogue between Thompson and a fake radio host, the elderly fiddler introduces the song as one of the 'old time pieces' he learnt 'befo' the Civil War', emphasising the date

[87] For 'age-heaping' in a historical context, see David Hackett Fischer, *Growing Old in America*, Expanded Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 86-87.
[88] 'WSM to Feature Old-Time Tunes', *Nashville Tennessean*, 27 December 1925, 17; '"Let Mellie Dunham Come Here", Says "Uncle Jimmy", Eager For Contest', *Nashville Tennessean*, 5 January 1926, 12.
[89] George D. Hay, *The Story of the Grand Ole Opry* (Nashville: WSM, 1945), 1-2.
[90] '"Uncle Jimmy" Wins Fiddlers' Contest As Throngs Cheer', *Nashville Tennessean*, 20 January 1926, 12.
[91] Wolfe, *A Good-Natured Riot*, 72.

with audible pride. The record has all the classic hallmarks of a Lost Cause 'text', particularly that potent combination of nostalgia, loss, and revival.[92] It is significant that at least one listener wrote to WSM believing, mistakenly, that Thompson had 'worn the gray' during the war, when he had only been a child at the time.[93] In this context, it is possible that making Thompson a few years older gave the impression that he belonged to the esteemed 'Civil War Generation', a sleight of hand not unlike that perpetuated by many of Thompson's age who attempted to swindle a veterans' pension from the state of Tennessee.[94]

Fan letters give some hint at the geographical breakdown of Thompson's audience.[95] Rural and urban listeners across North America tuned in to hear Thompson fiddle, with a large contingent in the Midwest.[96] To take the same example of the listener who mistook

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[92] These characteristics of the Lost Cause, for example, were central to *Confederate Veteran* magazine, which was published from Nashville: John A. Simpson, *Edith D. Pope and Her Nashville Friends: Guardians of the Lost Cause in the Confederate Veteran* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003), 1–21. Thompson's broadcast-emulating records are essential sources for understanding his radio as well as recording career, as no recordings were made of his WSM appearances in the 1920s.

[93] 'Canada Applauds WSM Barn Dance Program', *Nashville Tennessean*, 17 January 1926, 44. This emphasis on antebellum music was not unusual. A press release about the elderly Tennessean fiddler Uncle Am Stuart reported that he 'doesn't read music. He can't. But he knows every tune that has been heard at southern barn dances 'befo' th' wah'': 'Untaught Fiddler Is Best in Three States', *Chronicle* [Shippensburg, Pennsylvania], 21 August 1924, 5, *Daily Democrat-Forum and Maryville Tribune* [Maryville, Missouri], 10 November 1924, 5.

[94] The state of Tennessee established a more liberal Board of Pension Examiners in 1891, which, if still hard to fool, made it easier for pension claimants to get through the system: Brian Craig Miller, *Empty Sleeves: Amputation in the Civil War South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015), 171. Other connections between Confederate veterans and the *Opry* became more pronounced in later years. The Union Gospel Tabernacle, what became the Ryman Auditorium and permanent home of the *Opry* from 1942 onwards, had a Confederate Gallery that was built by the United Daughters of the Confederacy after a veterans' reunion in the venue in 1897: William Eiland, *Nashville's Mother Church: The History of the Ryman Auditorium.* (Nashville: Opryland USA, 1992.), 16-17.

[95] Radio scholars such as Diane Pecknold rightly warn that the selection and printing of specific letters tells more about the efforts of radio stations to cajole sponsors than any accurate sense of listener reception. Nevertheless, such letters are still useful indicators of both the kinds of audience that appreciated Thompson's playing, and how WSM wished to present the popularity of its aged artists: Diane Pecknold, *The Selling Sound: The Rise of the Country Music Industry* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 2-10.

[96] Charles Wolfe makes this conclusion from an extensive review of surviving listener letters. Wolfe also argues that part of the popularity of Thompson's initial WSM broadcasts

Thompson for a Civil War veteran, W. H. Whitelock heard WSM from as far away as Buffalo, South Dakota, and was inspired by Thompson to remember his own grandfather who 'wore the blue' during the War, suggesting that, for some northern listeners at least, advanced age helped facilitate a sense of sectional reconciliation. Thompson was not the only old southern fiddler on the new mass media to appeal to national appetites for southerness. In a *Talking Machine World* advertisement designed to wholesale Uncle Am Stuart records to distributers, copy explained that Stuart, described by his fiddle contest moniker as the 'champion fiddler' from the 'Sunny South', made records that were 'brilliant business builders' for sellers in both the North or South' [Appendix 2.8].[97]

Significantly, WSM were careful to ensure the public was aware that old southern listeners enjoyed Thompson's fiddling by selectively choosing to publish their letters in the local press. In a letter praising both Thompson and Uncle Dave Macon, T. B. Bryan from Burl, Alabama, asked the station's manager to 'Shake the old men's hands for 200 of us and tell them to come again … Those old tunes carry us back to the days gone by that are cherished recollections to all of us who are watching life's sun over in the western hills of time.' WSM likely speculated that a satisfied audience of older listeners, like the mere presence of an older performer, helped to brand the music as 'old-time'.[98]

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was down to a set of unique weather conditions that provided an unusually clear broadcasting signal, meaning it could be heard in far-reaching parts of the country: Charles Wolfe, *A Good-Natured Riot,* 69.

[97] 'Canada Applauds WSM Barn Dance Program', *Nashville Tennessean,* 17 January 1926, 44; 'Uncle Am Stuart: Champion Fiddler of Tennessee', *Talking Machine World,* 15 August 1924, 53.

[98] 'Canada Applauds WSM Barn Dance Program', *Nashville Tennessean,* 17 January 1926, 44. Similarly, Mr and Mrs Morgan Burket, a self-described 'couple of old folks, past sixty' from the 'rustic regions and rural districts of the Ozark mountains', were the only family in Marble, Arkansas to own a radio, and so welcomed the company of townmates as well as the 'exceptional fiddler' they heard on-air, who they sent their personal regards to: 'WSM Notes', *Nashville Tennessean,* 20 December 1925, 58. Old listeners also engaged with Thompson in more intimate ways. An elderly couple in 1926 asked Thompson to furnish the music for their golden wedding anniversary, a performance the *Tennessean* predicted would cause 'the old people' to 'turn back the pages of time and dance the Virginia reel and other dances of their younger days': 'Golden Wedding Anniversary To Be Celebrated', *Nashville Tennessean,* 24 February 1926, 3.

If Thompson embodied an idea of Dixie, one that appealed to some old southern listeners, he also more specifically represented an older, pastoral Tennessee. Hay described in his biography how Thompson personified the 'wealth of music material … in the Tennessee Hills'. In all likelihood, Hay also used such language on-air to promote Thompson.[99] The linking of any performer with a region and regional style is always problematic, but particularly so for musicians who have lived for so many years and in so many places. Arguably, Thompson's fiddling style was as much 'Texan' as it was 'Tennessean', due to the many years he had spent living in Texas.[100] Equally, while Thompson genuinely was a farmer, he was no mountaineer. Overlooking these discrepancies, Hay presented Thompson as the old man of the Tennessee mountains who performed 'real' Tennessean music.

This appeal of Thompson as an embodiment of white, rural Tennessean culture is contextualised by musical and social trends in the state during the 1920s. Contrary to popular memory, Nashville was a buzzing hub of jazz and dance bands, much to the contestation of the city's moral reformers. The *Nashville Tennessean* linked Thompson's antebellum songs to how the 'culture wars' of the 'Jazz Age' were playing out in Nashville:

> Old tunes like old lovers are the best … jazz has not completely turned the tables on such tunes as 'Pop Goes the Weasel' and 'Turkey in the Straw'. America may not be swinging its partners at a neighbor's barn dance but it seems to have the habit of clamping on its ear phones and patting its feet as gaily as it ever did when old-time fiddlers got to going.[101]

Like many other outlets of the era, the *Tennessean* framed a pair of centuries-old songs of British and Irish provenance as in 'competition' with jazz, a genre that frequently conjured notions of modernity, non-conformity, urban life, immorality, sexual liberation, youth, and African American culture.[102] Although it is nothing new to argue that symbolic 'battles'

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[99] Hay, *The Story of the Grand Ole Opry*, 1-2.
[100] For Thompson's fiddling influences, see Wolfe, *A Good-Natured Riot*, 73.
[101] 'WSM to Feature Old-Time Tunes', *Nashville Tennessean*, 27 December 1925, 17.
[102] For Nashville's thriving dance and jazz scenes in the 1920s, see P. J. Broome and Clay Tucker, *The Other Music City: The Dance Bands and Jazz Musicians of Nashville 1920 to*

between ‘old-time music’ and ‘race music’ reflected some of the more serious racial tensions of the 1920s, this particular example shows how temporal language (‘Old tunes’ and ‘old lovers’) and protagonists identified as *old* rather than white (‘old-time fiddlers’) masked the underlying racialisation of musical styles and segregation of sound in the interwar recording and broadcasting industries.[103]

Thompson also stimulated reflections on the changing gender politics of the day. ‘Uncle Jimmy is old-fashioned and is proud of it’, the *Tennessean* reported in an early press release, ‘For that reason, when he had his picture taken with his niece, he insisted that she let her hair down.’ Thompson told the newspaper, ‘I don't like these new-fangled styles women wears’.[104] In a *Radio Digest* article, a photograph of Thompson with niece Eva gazing up at him adoringly visually captured the age and gender relations he endorsed and represented [Appendix 2.9].[105] Thompson’s insistence that his niece wore her hair long was a direct rejection of the 1920s trend for women to wear their hair up or in a ‘bob’ style. In Tennessee and across much of the Bible Belt, evangelists published whole tomes on the sins of bobbed hair, which for them challenged male entitlement to control female bodies.[106] As Mary Ellen Pethel has shown, Nashville’s remarkably progressive female universities and colleges were sites of much political contestation from the city’s moral traditionalists, not least regarding the bobbed-haired female activists at single-sex campuses.[107] The cantankerous Thompson was almost ‘heroically’ unembarrassed in his pessimism about the ‘Flapper Era’, but his age

1970 (Nashville: American Press Print. Co, 1990). Though widely acknowledged in the years prior, folklorist Eloise Hubbard Linscott discussed the Irish provenance of ‘Turkey in the Straw’ in 1939: Eloise Hubbard Linscott, *Folk Songs of Old New England* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1939).

[103] For racial segregation and commercial roots music, see Miller, *Segregating Sound*, 1-11.

[104] ‘WSM to Feature Old-Time Tunes’, *Nashville Tennessean*, 27 December 1925, 17.

[105] ‘Uncle Jimmy Thompson at WSM’, *Radio Digest*, 9 January 1926, 13.

[106] Thomas A. Robinson and Lanette D. Ruff, *Out of the Mouths of Babes: Girl Evangelists in the Flapper Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 51-60. An example of religious reservations about female hair, albeit a few years later, see John R. Rice, *Bobbed Hair, Bossy Wives, and Women Preachers* (Murfreesboro, Tennessee: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1941).

[107] Mary Ellen Pethel, *Athens of the New South: College Life and the Making of Modern Nashville* (Knoxville: University Tennessee Press, 2017), 65-106.

gave him licence to comment without it being too 'serious' . A similar case in which assumptions about Thompson's age lightened social commentary occurs in his 1930 record 'Uncle Jimmie's (sic) Favorite Fiddling Pieces' (Vocalion 5456). During the opening dialogue, Thompson describes gleefully the cheap, strong whiskey he enjoyed as a young man. For record buyers who could no longer partake legally in some pleasures, particularly in Prohibition-era Tennessee, a state known for both its temperance advocacy and whiskey production, listening to an old man talk about the 'good old days' was a harmless way to laugh at the pious abnegation of the present moment.[108]

Despite overall emphasis on Thompson's age and his frequent tirades against modern times and trends, depictions of him, like those of fiddlers at contests, focused on his virility. After fiddling for over an hour during his first broadcast, producers interrupted Thompson to ask politely if he 'hadn't done enough fiddling?', to which the septuagenarian replied 'Why shucks, a man don't get warmed up in an hour. I just won an eight-day fiddling contest down at Dallas, Texas, and here's my blue ribbon to prove it.'[109] In another iteration of the story, Thompson instructed Hay to 'Tell the neighbors to send in their requests and I'll play 'em if it takes me all night!'[110] Despite the fact his radio performances had no live audience, the *Nashville Tennessean* reported that the 'spirit of the barn dance has been with [Thompson] so long that he not only plays his fiddle before the microphone but steps it off at the same time.'[111] In a cartoon for a Pennsylvanian newspaper, a caricatured Thompson dances wildly in a barn to the amazement of the barnyard animals. 'For real, foot-stirring music', the caption reads, 'Uncle Jimmy Thompson … will take the old-fashioned barn dance any time. Yas, suh!' [Appendix 2.10].[112] Thompson even had the power to revive

[108] For more on liquor and prohibition in Tennessee, see Joe Coker, *Liquor in the Land of the Lost Cause: Southern White Evangelicals and the Prohibition Movement* (Louisville, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 2-55.
[109] Hay, *The Story of the Grand Ole Opry*, 1.
[110] Quote from a George Hay-penned article for country music magazine *Pickin' and Singin' News* in the early 1950s, referenced in Wolfe, *A Good-Natured Riot*, 68.
[111] 'WSM To Broadcast On Christmas Eve', *Nashville Tennessean*, 20 December 1925, 59.
[112] 'Around The Dial,' *Wilkes-Barre Record* [Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania], 22 November 1926, 11.

other elders: the *Tennessean* claimed that even Thompson's '73-year-old wife [Aunt Ella Manners] "hits the floor" when he strikes a favorite tune.'[113] Thompson also encouraged the idea that he was not a stereotypically 'weak' old man. In 1926, the performer told *Radio Age* that he would still 'be a young man' when he turned 90 years old, and informed the *Tennessean* that he would 'lay with' his Maine rival, Mellie Dunham, 'like a bulldog.[114] On his 1930 recording of 'Lynchburg' (Vocalion 5456), Thompson tells the fake host Bill Brown that he has 'grown grandchildren and great big great grandchildren. [But I'm] Running cars and trucks yet. And playing the fiddle yet. And I love to look at a pretty woman just as much as I ever did.' Evidently, the older Thompson made personal efforts to reassert his strength and masculinity in the face of assumptions that he was a debilitated old man.[115]

The state of Thompson's physical condition in the late 1920s, however, is unclear. An acquaintance of Thompson's recalled that 'even in his eighties he was strong enough to carry a bushel of corn on his back to a mill several miles away.'[116] This nostalgic remembrance conflicts with other accounts of his health. In 1926, Thompson broke his fiddling-arm and was ill for several weeks, meaning several missed appearances on WSM, and a special 'welcome-back' broadcast when he was well again.[117] Despite his otherwise macho attitude, Thompson admitted publicly that he had one eye 'failing him', and that he

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[113] Manners supposedly accompanied Thompson at local performances, though seemingly less so on the radio, however, little is known about her: '"Let Mellie Dunham Come Here", Says "Uncle Jimmy", Eager For Contest', *Nashville Tennessean*, 5 January 1926, 12.
[114] 'Old Time Fiddler', *Radio Age*, April 1926, 28; '"Let Mellie Dunham Come Here", Says "Uncle Jimmy", Eager For Contest', *Nashville Tennessean*, 5 January 1926, 12.
[115] For some key works on ageing and masculinity, see Toni Calasanti, 'Feminist Gerontology and Old Men', *Journals of Gerontology* 59, no. 6 (1 November 2004): 305-314; Deborah K. van den Hoonaard, 'Aging and Masculinity: A Topic Whose Time Has Come', *Journal of Aging Studies* 21, no. 4 (2007): 277-280; Edward H. Thompson, 'Images of Old Men's Masculinity: Still a Man?', *Sex Roles* 55, no. 9-10 (1 November 2006): 633-648; Gabriela Spector-Mersel, 'Never-Aging Stories: Western Hegemonic Masculinity Scripts', *Journal of Gender Studies* 15, no. 1 (1 March 2006): 67-82.
[116] Wolfe, *A Good-Natured Riot*, 81.
[117] '"Let Mellie Dunham Come Here", Says "Uncle Jimmy", Eager For Contest', *Nashville Tennessean*, 5 January 1926, 12; 'WSM Announces Varied Programs', *Nashville Tennessean*, 27 June 1926, 22.

was not confident in taking the long drive to Maine to fiddle against Dunham. A neighbour recalled that Thompson was 'mainly a farmer, until his age got the best of him. And while he was a farmer he had fiddled, so he just quit trying to work on account of his age and went on playin' the fiddle.'[118] When Thompson is understood as a retired agricultural worker in a culture where masculinity and physical labour were intimately entwined, his and the media's repeated assertions about his supposed physical well-being, indefatigable fiddle talents, ability to drive a truck, and undiminished sexual libido begin to make more sense.

As with fiddlers' contests, images of virility and debility coexisted in representations of Thompson's WSM broadcasts. Alongside George Hay's descriptions of Thompson dancing, he recalled how he had offered the elderly fiddler a 'comfortable chair' during their first broadcast.[119] This small detail featured in a photograph of Hay and Thompson that circulated in the national media and has since become an iconic image in country music. In the photograph, Thompson sits looking rather bemused in a 'comfortable chair' in front of a WSM microphone, with Hay standing next to him, his script and famous steamboat whistle in hand [Appendix 2.11].[120] That the shot was from a staged recreation of the original broadcast, taken a year after it was first made, suggests that the chair and what it represented, namely the tropes of 'southern hospitality' and a deference to debilitated elders, were integral features of Thompson's public persona.[121] Debility, after all, was an obvious signifier of age over the auditory medium of radio. For those who never saw photographs of the white-haired and wrinkled performer, descriptions of his fragility and need for a comfy chair were quickfire ways to aurally emphasise agedness. Another, more abstract explanation is that Thompson's own contradictory body, in some regards debilitated, yet in

[118] Wolfe, *A Good-Natured Riot*, 75.
[119] Hay, *The Story of the Grand Ole Opry*, 1-3.
[120] 'WSM to Feature Old-Time Tunes', *Nashville Tennessean*, 27 December 1925, 17.
[121] A selection of publications that reprinted the photograph include: 'Old Hictory' Tells Them That WSM Is On the Radio Station Map to Stay There', *Battle Creek Enquirer* [Battle Creek, MI], 27 June 1926, 20; 'Solemn Judge Broadcasts Fun', *Evening Journal* [Wilmington, DE], 2 July 1926, 24.

other respects virile, acted as a metaphor for the values and traditions of the Old South which, if under pressures from the passage of time, were nevertheless 'living'.

A third and more cynical explanation is that the National Life and Accident Insurance Company, the commercial enterprise that funded WSM ('We Shield Millions'), had a vested interest in placing a frail old man at the front of its entertainment arm. Like most insurance companies, National Life exploited commonly held insecurities about old age that were widespread in the pre-Social Security era, but also more prominent in the mid-1920s as movements towards pensions began to raise consciousness about the vulnerability of families dependent on aged breadwinners. A National Life advertisement published just a few months before Thompson's broadcast is typical of its marketing strategy, particularly the distinctly gendered pressures they placed on prospective female customers:

> It is not easy to look ahead always - and prepare for harder times. 'The rose strewn paths of youth and joy' allure women into forgetfulness of the years when their graceful bodies will be bent and aged. Sometimes they even resent their husband's anticipating such changes, and try to prevent a man's buying Life Insurance for their protection. … Insure and prevail upon the men wage earners in your family to insure … Only your immediate compression of time's certainties will enable you to meet old age and adversity with composure.[122]

Contemporary market research suggested women were prominent driving forces behind the buying of life insurance. This was particularly true of women who were financially dependent on elderly relatives or husbands.[123] In this context, it is feasible that WSM considered a familial, elderly male performer like 'Uncle Jimmy', and his younger niece, to be a useful mascots in encouraging consumers to consider their own financial security should an older male breadwinner of the family pass away.

In 1943, *Tune-In* magazine announced 'Uncle Jimmy is dead', some twelve years after his death: '[H]is place as King Bee of the [*Opry*] now taken by Uncle Dave Macon,

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[122] 'Shielded!', *Nashville Tennessean*, 15 March 1925, 10.
[123] For the ways notions of gender and class affected the life insurance industry, see Dan Bouk, *How Our Days Became Numbered: Risk and the Rise of the Statistical Individual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), xxii, 40-41.

who admits seventy years of age.'[124] Macon in fact began broadcasting and recording before Thompson. Unlike his aged fiddler peers, who were so old they only had few years on the new media before they died, Macon was merely in his fifties when he became a professional musician but continued performing until his death in 1953. The earliest stages of his career were characterised by notions of 'agedness'. According to family lore, it was an audience member's reaction to his age that inspired him to take up music professionally. In 1920, while on vacation at a hotel ranch near Vanita, Oklahoma, Macon entertained guests with his banjo, and a guest told him 'I was so blue and down and out I did not care to live any longer. But by seeing you at your age act out as well as playing and singing on your banjo at the same time, my spirits just rose and refreshed my whole soul and body'.[125] The media exaggerated his age even in his early years in the public eye. In 1925, the *Tennessean* described the 55-year-old implausibly as the 'oldest banjo picker in Dixie.'[126] Even Macon's nickname, the 'Dixie Dewdrop', which was vaguely redolent of notions of spring, was an ironic reference to his senior age.

The interaction between Macon and modernity defined his media persona and helps explain why he became 'aged' in his middle-age. While the benefits of technology seemingly 'pulled' some aged musicians into the recording and broadcasting worlds, technological developments also made obsolete more traditional trades, thereby 'pushing' ageing amateur musicians into careers as professional musicians. In the 1910s, Macon owned the Macon Midway Mule and Wagon Transportation Company, a mule-drawn freight service operating throughout Middle Tennessee. The arrival of cheaply produced Ford motor trucks transformed the freight industry, creating insurmountable competition for Macon's mules. Macon's experience as a businessman of an older generation forced into retirement

[124] 'Grand Ole Opry', *Tune-In*, May 1943, 39.
[125] Michael D. Doubler, *Dixie Dewdrop: The Uncle Dave Macon Story* (Champaign, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2018), 81-82.
[126] 'WSM to Feature Old-Time Tunes', *Nashville Tennessean*, 27 December 1925, 17.

by industrialism at the turn of the twentieth century broadly fitted with contemporary 'scrap heap' narratives about ageing.[127]

Many freight workers retrained with the modernisation of the industry, but Macon did not, despite ample opportunity. Macon's peers claimed that he once rejected an offer from a nearby Rutherford County competitor to amalgamate their businesses, telling them 'Boys, you can keep your trucks … just give me my banjo.'[128] This light-hearted account may reflect some of Macon's outward character, but does not reflect how age more seriously factored into his choice to close his business in 1920. Nearing his sixtieth birthday, Macon likely had a sense of economic realism about the prospective gains of reskilling with only a few years of his working life left. Macon was also in a somewhat more reasonably secure financial position than many of his generation. Savings from his company, which he closed down before losing out to the automobile, and inheritances from deceased family members, including a farm and house worth $8,500, collectively constituted an informal bank of 'rocking chair money' that he could fall upon if necessary. Nevertheless, his decision to become a professional musician was still considered unusual. Macon's brother supposedly told him he 'was too old to consider anything like becoming an entertainer, especially with all the travel involved', and should focus his efforts instead on 'farming, raising his children, and otherwise enjoying his retirement.'[129]

It is unclear how physically capable Macon was in his later years. Polite expressions of disbelief about Macon's age were as common as emphases on his vitality. 'Just past his 63rd birthday', *Radio Mirror* informed readers in 1935, 'Uncle Dave continues his cutting of capers before the microphone, capers which would quickly exhaust a man half his age.'[130] In a Hay-penned piece for the *Mirror* in 1942, the producer claimed 'nobody knows Uncle

[127] For more on 'scrap-heap' narratives of ageing in the early twentieth century, see Haber and Gratton, *Old Age and the Search for Security*, 88-115.
[128] Doubler, *Dixie Dewdrop*, 55.
[129] Ibid, 56.
[130] Jack Harris, 'The Grand Ole Opry', *Radio Mirror*, July 1935, 82.

Dave's actual age, although he admits it is better'n sixty. The best guess is that it's close to 75, although anyone who has seen him in action on the Opry stage would find it hard to believe.'[131] 'Well up in his sixties', *Rural Radio* stressed in 1938, 'Uncle Dave works his own farm near Readyville, Tennessee, and is in perfect health.'[132] At live performances, Macon was famous for twirling his banjo underneath his legs during live sets, likely breaking some audience assumptions that the old musician sat down to perform because he needed to rest.[133] Despite George Hay's flattery, Macon was jokingly playful on the topic of frailty: in 1925, Macon told a *Birmingham Age-Herald* reporter that his accompanist Sid Harkreader would 'come down to help the ol' man out.'[134] Audiences picked up on this contradictory image: one set of fans made a mule-drawn wagon for Macon as a gift which had the phrase 'Slowing down, but still moving' written along the side [Appendix 2.12].[135]

The recurrent motifs throughout Macon's career of the automobile and the mule, both real and imagined, reinforced the idea that he was retired by modernity. A combination of unfamiliarity, scepticism, fear, and necessity characterised Macon's ambiguous attitude towards motor vehicles. A fellow musician recalled several occasions when journeys with Macon were delayed due to his paranoia that the noise of the car would mask the sound of a train when crossing railway tracks. On his 1928 song 'From Earth To Heaven' (Brunswick C2125), Macon swore he would 'rather ride a wagon and go to heaven, than to hell in an automobile.' Like many of his generation, however, Macon never learnt to drive, and relied instead on his family, promoters and bandmates to drive him to concerts.[136] Indeed, Louis M. Kyriakoudes argues that Macon recordings reflected the wider ambiguities felt in the region

[131] 'What's New From Coast to Coast', *Radio Mirror*, January 1942, 44, 66.
[132] *Rural Radio*, May 1938, 11.
[133] The only film of Macon, the *Opry* movie, shows him twirling his banjo: Frank McDonald, *Grand Ole Opry* (Republic Pictures, 1940).
[134] 'Bijou Banjoist', *Birmingham Age-Herald*, 13 January 1925, quoted in Eric Neil Hermann, '"In The Good Old Days of Long Ago": Echoes of Vaudeville and Minstrelsy in the Music of Uncle Dave Macon' (PhD dissertation, University of Maryland, 2016), 70.
[135] Charles Wolfe, liner notes to Uncle Dave Macon, *Keep My Skillet Good And Greasy*, (Bear Family Records BCD 15978 JM, 2004) compact disc.
[136] Ibid.

towards motor vehicles, including some of their benefits.[137] In two 1920s recordings, 'New Ford Motor Car' (Victor 5261) and 'On The Dixie Bee Line (In That Henry Ford Of Mine)' (Vocalion 15320), Macon extolled the virtues of modern transportation. The retired mule wagon rider even sent copies of these records to Ford, perhaps in the hope of attaining the patronage some old fiddlers were receiving from the industrialist in the mid-1920s.[138] In the 1940 Hollywood film *Grand Ole Opry*, Macon performs in the back of a packed motor car with other cast members [Appendix 2.13].[139]

Still, paeans to the car were outweighed by those for mules. Macon recorded four songs with 'mule' in the title, in addition to dozens of other songs with lyrical and sonic references to animals; 'Go Along Mule' (Vocalion 5165) even features his impression of a mule.[140] The banjoist's first vaudeville show, entitled *Whoa Mule!*, featured the banjoist in rural attire arriving onstage atop a mule-drawn wagon.[141] Similarly, a slogan Macon used for his company, that he later reused in the lyrics to 'From Earth To Heaven', expressed pride in his antiquated business: 'Old Time Religion, Old Reliable Way, our gasoline consists of whip, corn oats and hay.'[142] All of which helps explain why Macon was chosen to perform at public addresses by Lambert Estes Gwinn, challenger in the Democratic gubernatorial primaries in Tennessee in 1930.[143] The central plank of the ultimately unsuccessful Gwinn campaign was to fix the 'extravagance and waste' of the highway construction programme coordinated by incumbent Governor Henry Horton. Though Gwinn presented himself as a progressive, and not inherently anti-highway or automobile - critics claimed Gwinn was hypocritical for driving on the highway system he chastised to get to his meetings on time -

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[137] Louis M. Kyriakoudes, *The Social Origins of the Urban South: Race, Gender, and Migration in Nashville and Middle Tennessee, 1890-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 13.
[138] Charles Wolfe, liner notes to Uncle Dave Macon, *Keep My Skillet Good And Greasy*.
[139] Frank McDonald, *Grand Ole Opry* (Republic Pictures, 1940).
[140] For all Macon's mule-based recordings, see Russell, *Country Music Records*, 573-578.
[141] Uncle Dave Macon, 'My Life and Experience Written Especially for Brunswick Topics', *Brunswick Topics* (New York: Brunswick Records, 1928): 10-11, reprinted in Charles Wolfe, liner notes to Uncle Dave Macon, *Keep My Skillet Good And Greasy*.
[142] Ibid.
[143] 'Gwinn Speaks At Old Hickory', *Nashville Tennessean*, 3 August 1930, 6.

the performance of a well-known elderly performer, who upheld old-fashioned travel and rebuked the fetishization of automobile on radio and records, set the stage nicely for his almost single-issue political campaign.[144] In 'We Are Up Against It Now' (Vocalion 15447), recorded four years before Gwinn's campaign, Macon had even sung about the injustice of small-time farmers bearing the taxes for highway construction.

There are important parallels between the mule/automobile dialectic in Macon's career, and conflicts between the old-fashioned music-maker and the recording and broadcasting technologies used to disseminate his music. Uncle Dave Macon occasionally struggled to record, as he was unaccustomed to the studio format. In 1942, nearly two decades into his recording career, *Radio Mirror* informed readers that Macon was a 'real problem for the boys in the sound-control booth, since he likes to amble all over the stage and generally "cut- up" during performances.'[145] When he performed live, Macon would stamp his foot to keep rhythm, but the sensitive microphone set up required him to keep his foot still, a modern performing condition he struggled to get used to. While Macon eventually conceded to the demands of the medium, evidently with success considering his prolific recording career, it must be assumed that other elderly performers found similar challenges harder to acclimatise to.[146]

Alton Delmore, who played on Macon recordings, had a mixed verdict on the compatibility of the old performer with the modern recording environment, and not just the technology: 'Some musicians thought he was lot of trouble … [but] they just didn't understand the old gentleman.' However, Delmore also recalled how Macon, while recording in New Orleans at a session organised by Eli Oberstein for Victor in 1935, played the clown in front of a group of black spiritual singers awaiting their turn to record. This caused issues for Oberstein, as Macon kept turning his head to his 'audience', thereby

[144] 'Gwinn Speaks to Crowd of 300 in Madison County', *Nashville Tennessean*, 4 May 1930, 9.
[145] 'What's New From Coast to Coast', *Radio Mirror*, January 1942, 44, 46.
[146] Wolfe, *A Good-Natured Riot*, 111.

moving his mouth away from the microphone. 'Now, Uncle Dave,' Oberstein interjected after having lost a good take, 'you are not here to sing for those boys back there, so come on now and let's get something going.' Macon responded curtly: 'I can sing anyway I want to and still be heard. I've got a lot of git up and go … I don't have to be bossed around by some New York Sharpshooter just to make a few records.'[147] While Delmore interpreted the phrase 'git up and go' to refer to Macon's volume, the comment also reveals something of the banjoist's defensiveness about his age. Macon's enthusiastic banjo-playing, singing, whooping, dancing, joking, and feet stomping may have served him well at live venues where volume and showmanship was in demand, such as theatre halls, high schools or street corners, but such antics disturbed the delicate sonic balance needed in the studio.[148]

A similar generational and culture clash surfaced when Macon came to record in New York City. In 1943, radio magazine *Tune-In* issued a story in which Macon, busking on the streets of New York while waiting for his recording session to begin, was asked by a local where he came from. *Tune-In* reported that Macon, after responding that he came from Tennessee and being told 'They have strange people down there in Tennessee, don't they?' retorted that they did, but they 'don't come in bunches like they do up here.''[149] Similarly, when a local asked disparagingly whether Macon had ever seen anything as big as New York, the fast-witted Tennessean rebutted 'Yes sir, I have. I was born and raised in the hills of Tennessee and they are a lot bigger than New York City.'[150] Whether clashing with the automobile, broadcasting and recording studios, or New York City, 'old Uncle Dave', as *Tune-In* called him, was a hero of antimodernist resistance against the modern world.

Unsurprisingly, Macon secured gigs with broadly generational themes. Ironically, however, many of these events, in one way or another, reflected the modernising South that

[147] Alton Delmore, *Truth Is Stranger Than Publicity*, Second Edition (Nashville, Tennessee: Country Music Foundation Press, 1995), 170-171.
[148] For the efforts made in early roots recordings to attain a sonic balance, see Ward and Huber, *A&R Pioneers*, 113, 172.
[149] 'Grand Ole Opry', *Tune-In*, May 1943, 40.
[150] Doubler, *Dixie Dewdrop*, 96.

Macon symbolically kicked back against. In the 1920s alone, Macon performed at a congress of the Tennessee Rural Letter Carrier's Association, then in the middle of a campaign for widows' pensions; a men's club evening of the First Presbyterian church in Nashville featuring Senator W. R. Webb giving a talk on the challenges facing different generations; a banquet for 'old-timers' of the Nashville Railway and Light Company; and a meal in honour of a long-standing company executive of Phillips & Buttorff Company, a prominent Nashville manufacturing firm that produced radio sets.[151] Macon appeared at similarly intergenerational events at WSM. In 1935, Rush D. Holt, a 29-year-old senator-elect from West Virginia, appeared on on-air to commemorate Thompson Jefferson's birthday, and specifically to introduce Macon. The *Tennessean* reported that 'Most of the Opry performers are double [Holt's] age. Uncle Dave, the senator's favorite, is sixty-five.' For Holt, then the youngest ever senator, an opportunity to be photographed and heard on-air with the older Tennessean bought him political capital as a figure who, if young, still respected his elders [Appendix 2.14].[152]

Like Thompson, Macon appealed to older generations. In reference to a show in Indiana in 1928, the *Noblesville Ledger* informed readers that when 'Uncle Dave and Sam [McGee, Macon's accompanist] get together the old timers rolls back the rugs, put the lamp over in the left-hand corner of the room and have a "shindig".'[153] WSM was keen to stress

[151] At the Letter Carrier's Association, Macon was erroneously billed as a 'noted old time fiddler': 'Letter Carriers' Problems Will Be Debated At Meet', *Kingsport Times* [Kingsport, Tennessee], 20 June 1926, 6; 'Pensions Urged For Widows of Letter Carriers', *Nashville Tennessean*, 6 July 1926, 1. Macon was also described as an 'old-timer' at his church performance: 'Good Old Days Excelled by Present, W.R. 'Sawney' Webb Declares to Men's Club Here', *Nashville Tennessean*, 11 May 1926, 1. The Railway event was a curious choice for Macon as it commemorated the 'Days when mule-cars had just given away to electric trolleys on Nashville street railway tracks - times when an electric light in a home was a wonder for the neighbors to come and see': 'Old Timers of Street Railway Light Service Hold Meeting', *Nashville Tennessean*, 3 February 1928, 1; 'Firm's Employees Honor McCarthy', *Nashville Tennessean*, 30 December 1925, 14;'Additions of Radios and Accessories Becomes Giant Factor in Business', *Nashville Tennessean*, 20 December 1925, 72.

[152] 'Holt Pinch Hits For Hay', *Nashville Tennessean*, 21 April 1935, 4.

[153] 'Uncle Dave Macon and Sam McGee From Tennessee', *Noblesville Ledge* [Noblesville, Indiana], 11 June 1928, 5.

the intergenerational appeal of Macon's act. *Radio Age* reported that 'Uncle Dave' had been 'pickin' the banjo for a half-century' and performed 'old time songs of the South [was] still very much beloved by the older generation, and interesting to the younger people who listen to the barn dance programs on Saturday night.'[154] The *Birmingham Post* claimed the 'banjo playing philosopher … offers wisdom gleaned from years of living the farm and playing old-time music'. Macon himself played up to this character, telling the *Post* 'Well, now, youngster, life is like this old banjo of mine. If you hit the wrong string you don't get nothing but discord … [T]here's lots of folks who don't know how to tune the banjo of life'.[155]

In a 1938 songbook, Macon sermonised with sage-like authority on the topic of youth. The front cover showed a photograph of the young Macon 'at the age of sweet sixteen'; while on the back cover sat an image of the elderly Macon, 'at threescore and ten'. Inside, a message from Macon read: 'At my advanced age I realize more keenly the great mental powers of youth, and could I command an audience of the youth of our land today, I would say to them: "Learn the beautiful things of life in your early years - from Holy Writ we learn, Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth."'[156] Words of spiritual wisdom from an older Tennessean resonated in an era and state marked by fears of a 'generation gap' in religiosity. A central tenet of the Butler Act (1925) that led to the infamous 'Scopes' trial in Tennessee was that the teaching of evolution corrupted *young* minds.[157] Macon expressed his religious objections about evolutionary teaching in his 1926 recording 'The Bible's True' (Vocalion 15322): 'Evolution says Man came from a monkey / I don't believe no such a thing in a week of Sundays'. Macon was one of many old-time acts to record

[154] 'Banjo Plucker', *Radio Age*, July 1926, 51. An almost identical press release was published as George A. King, 'Solemn Old Judge Likes South', *Radio Digest*, July 1926, 28.
[155] Luke Oliver, 'Banjo Just Like Life', *Birmingham Post*, 10 January 1925, quoted in Doubler, *Dixie Dewdrop*, 104.
[156] 'Uncle' Dave Macon, *Songs and Stories of Uncle Dave Macon* (Nashville, Tennessee: WSM, 1938), 28.
[157] The Butler Act, House Bill No. 185, Chapter No. 27, Public Acts of the State of Tennessee Passed by the 64th General Assembly, 1925.

antievolutionist songs in the wake of the trial, but when Macon confidently exclaims 'You know I'm right!' after one verse, there is a sense that his seniority gave him unique licence to opine on religious, moral and political matters.[158]

Tellingly, before 'The Bible's True' begins, Macon picks a short version of 'Will There Be Any Stars In My Crown', a hymn that expressed concerns about living a sufficiently Christian life before facing the Lord. An elderly and deeply religious man such as Macon, aware that he had little time to ensure his 'crown' had enough 'stars', may have felt a powerful moral and spiritual imperative to defend the validity of the Bible for the sake of future generations. This was not the only song Macon performed that was infused with religious perspectives on ageing. In 1937, Fred Ritchie was sent to the electric chair in a Tennessee state prison for murdering his wife. For his last request Ritchie asked that Macon sing on-air for him the song 'When I Take My Vacation in Heaven'. WSM producer Jack Harris tactlessly boasted to *Rural Radio* that the request indicated just 'how close the *Grand Ole Opry* comes to the hearts of its listeners.'[159] The song, in which a proximity to death is assuaged by the promise of release from earthly bondage, obviously appealed to this one listener who shared with Macon a heightened awareness of mortality, if for very different reasons.

Producers represented the *Opry* cast as a family, with Macon an older patriarch on and off stage. In publicity photographs of his various bands or as part of the entire *Opry* cast, Macon was always seated in the centre of the shot [Appendix 2.15].[160] In 1934, *Radio Stars* noted that Macon was 'sixty-four and the father of eight grown sons.'[161] Macon recruited

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[158] Charles Wolfe, 'Bible Country: The Good Book in Country Music', in *The Bible and Popular Culture in America,* ed. Allene Stuart Phy (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 85-101.
[159] Jack Harris, 'True Story of the Famous WSM Grand Ole Opry', *Rural Radio,* November 1938, 4.
[160] *Grand Ole Opry* publicity photograph, reprinted in liner notes to Uncle Dave Macon, *Keep My Skillet Good And Greasy*. For a similar image of Macon with his band the Moonshiners, see 'Uncle Dave on WIBA', *Wisconsin State Journal* [Madison, Wisconsin], 3 July 1931, 5.
[161] 'WSM Is Proudest Of Its Grand Ole Opry', *Radio Stars*, November 1934, 92.

one of his sons, Dorris, as his accompanist, and affectionately referred to younger non-relative musicians with whom he played with affectionally as his 'boys'.[162] The *Birmingham Post* even wrongly claimed in 1925 that accompanists Sid Harkreader and Sam McGee were Macon's biological sons.[163] The intergenerational relationship between Macon and these young male 'apprentices' blurred the lines between collegial and familial, and were mutually beneficial, with Macon gaining drivers and the younger musicians experience with a veteran entertainer. Macon's patriarch role on the *Opry* also played into some of the endemic sexism of barn dance radio. A photograph in *Rural Varieties* shows *Opry* performer Rachel Veach sitting on Macon's knee like a little girl [Appendix 2.16]. As Veach's hillbilly character was 'childlike', if not explicitly underage, with modern eyes it is hard not to ignore the sexual, even paedophilic, undertones of a 'girl' sitting on the knee of an old man, especially one who was not averse to performing songs with sexual messages. While contemporary audiences perhaps viewed such a moment as entirely innocent, the image at least broadly reinforced the authority of older men and dual sexualisation and infantilisation of women entertainers.[164]

Macon and his promoters stressed certain visual signifiers of his old age, both natural and affected. Bill Malone argues that Macon's dress revived a 'merry country gentleman' aesthetic of the Old South, but this 'gentleman' was also identifiably 'old'.[165] Descriptions of Macon's look regularly remarked on his 'chin whiskers', a descriptor for facial hair that captured both his age and animalistic character, a trope often associated with

[162] 'Bijou Banjoist', *Birmingham Age-Herald*, 13 January 1925, quoted in Eric Neil Hermann, '"In The Good Old Days of Long Ago"', 70.
[163] 'Uncle Dave Again Loew's Headliner', *Birmingham Post*, 10 January 1925, quoted in Eric Neil Hermann, '"In The Good Old Days of Long Ago"', 71. The *Atlanta Constitution* mistakenly referred to Harkreader as 'Fiddlin Sid Macon': 'Uncle Dave Macon', *Atlanta Constitution*, 2 March 1925, 12.
[164] 'The Grand Ole Opry of WSM - Nashville', *Radio Varieties*, December 1939, 21. For gender relations on barn dance radio, see McCusker, *Lonesome Cowgirls and Honky Tonk Angels*.
[165] Malone and Laird, *Country Music USA*, 74.

hillbilly performers.[166] In a widely circulated publicity photograph of Macon for his Loew Theater performances, his facial hair is magnified by his silhouetted shadow, an effect which, intended or not, made his 'whiskers' appear even more prominent [Appendix 2.17].[167] Similarly, Macon's gold-plated teeth were unmissable visual signifiers of both his age and commercial success. The *Tennessean* described in 1934 how Macon 'flashes his gold teeth in the spotlight which plays on him in WSM's brand new auditorium'.[168]

Sometimes, Macon's look was explicitly tied to a WSM sponsor. In one publicity photograph, Macon is seen smoking a lavish, old-fashioned pipe that befitted someone of his generation. In another photograph, Macon is seen holding Prince Albert tobacco, a brand that sponsored *Opry* broadcasts during the 1930s [Appendix 2.18].[169] Although anti-smoking campaigns were in their infancy in this period, many tobacco companies saw the writing on the wall regarding the increasingly irrefutable health warnings about tobacco from the medical profession. The lucrative industry launched both subtle, and occasionally not-so-subtle, marketing campaigns to rebuke medical concerns.[170] In this context, nothing better said cigarettes would not shorten your life than the image of a healthy, banjo-twirling, Prince-Albert-smoking elderly patron.

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[166] See 'Uncle Dave Again Loew's Headliner', *Birmingham Post*, 10 January 1925, quoted in Eric Neil Hermann, '"In The Good Old Days of Long Ago"', 71.
[167] George A. King, 'Solemn Old Judge Likes South', *Radio Digest*, July 1926, 29.
[168] 'Fisk Singers Appear In New York, Broadcast To WSM', *Nashville Tennessean*, 18 November 1934, 26. A photograph of Macon smiling in an early concert advertisement is a good example of how prominent his teeth were to his public image: 'Next Week - Uncle Dave Macon,' *Atlanta Constitution*, 27 February 1925, 20.
[169] Luke Oliver, 'Banjo Just Like Life', *Birmingham Post*, 10 January 1925, quoted in Doubler, *Dixie Dewdrop*, 104. A publicity photograph of Macon smoking his pipe is reprinted in liner notes to Uncle Dave Macon, *Keep My Skillet Good And Greasy*.
[170] It would not be until the 1950s that the real battle over cigarettes and public health began to penetrate popular culture, but struggles were already underway in the interwar years: Jacob Sullum, *For Your Own Good: The Anti-Smoking Crusade and the Tyranny of Public Health* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999), 15-39; Ronald Bayer and James Colgrove, 'Children and Bystanders First: The Ethics and Politics of Tobacco Control in the United States', in *Unfiltered: Conflicts Over Tobacco Policy and Public Health*, ed. Eric A. Feldman and Ronald Bayer (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2009), 8-37.

That the media regularly used the word 'picturesque' to describe the Macon aesthetic is significant, as a certain visual quaintness was part of why fans liked him.[171] Winefrieda Stinnerd, a 19-year old farmer from Laflin, Missouri, wrote to *Rural Radio* in 1939 to express her and her younger sisters' pleasure at seeing Macon's photograph in the magazine some months prior: 'We still get out *Rural Radio* and look at him.'[172] Although their curiosity can also be attributed to his 'hillbilly' look, it is notable that these fans collected images of the elderly Macon just as other radio listeners did of young heartthrobs. In 1927, *Radio Digest* printed a photographic jigsaw puzzle of different radio personalities, including Macon, whose characteristic look (a loosely worn tie, balding head and grey sideburns) make him the easiest to re-assemble [Appendix 2.19].[173] Macon was complicit in curating the place of age in his public image. He regularly wore a hat with the inscription 'Old But Regular' that acknowledged his age while clarifying his good health.[174] As Edward Ayers argues, Macon stood in for 'the good old days' of the rural South, but also specifically of Tennessee and his look reflected it.[175] Publicity photographs from the 1930s show Macon variously picking the banjo in a rocking chair in front of some agricultural machinery and in a barn with his feet on a plough.[176] Macon, like Thompson, represented a pastoral Tennessee of days gone by. Charles C. Rutherford, a record distributor at Sterchi Brothers Furniture Company, asked Macon to record because he would 'represent the state of Tennessee'.[177]

Perhaps the biggest tribute to Macon's ties to rural Tennessee came in Harry Harrison Kroll's 1928 novel *The Mountainy Singer*, which detailed the adventures of a boy

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[171] 'Banjo Plucker', *Radio Age*, July 1926, 51; 'What's New From Coast to Coast', *Radio Mirror*, January 1942, 44, 46.
[172] 'Radio Farm Digest', *Rural Radio*, January 1939.
[173] 'Assemble These Pictures of Radio Artists', *Radio Digest*, 15 January 1927, 13.
[174] Charles Wolfe, liner notes to *Uncle Dave Macon*.
[175] Ayers, *The Promise of the New South*, 395-396. In 1926, Radio Digest lauded Macon as a 'historic character of Tennessee': George A. King, 'Solemn Old Judge Likes South', *Radio Digest*, July 1926, 28-29.
[176] Various photographs of Uncle Dave Macon, c. late 1930s, accession number: MAN-PR-00039, Korine-Dunlap Collection, Center for Popular Music (hereafter CPM), Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.
[177] Doubler, *Dixie Dewdrop*, 94.

named Danny and a fictional hillbilly musician, 'Uncle Dave Saxon', who impresses the rural community with his old-time banjo-playing, particularly the real-life Macon number 'Nobody's Darling But Mine'. The performance leaves Danny spellbound: 'There was something nameless in the melancholy of both air and ballad. Yet Uncle Dave sang with a tender relish - singing as if he might have been that wanderer himself one harsh day long ago, and could now look back upon it without bitterness.' Kroll presents age as a significant dimension of Saxon's appeal. The fictionalised Macon character plays so well an elderly Tennessean swallows their false teeth in excitement.[178]

The Mountainy Singer was a transparently political text that was broadly aligned with the outlook of the 'Twelve Southerners' who wrote essays for the 1930 agrarian manifesto *I'll Take My Stand.* Kroll expressed publicly that the book was a rejoinder to the work of mountain settlement and mission schools to 'change the ways of the mountaineers without realizing that a veneer of sophistication might destroy the natural talents of the people', or, more simply, 'teach them how to hold a knife instead of how to sing "Nobody's Darling".'[179] Saxon, who used oral culture to encourage Danny towards a 'folk' rather than 'modern' life, was a literary instrument in the political struggles in the 1920s over education and culture in the Mountain South. However, while Saxon fulfilled the ideal of an elder who bequeathed southern traditions to younger generation, the character had little reservation about performing at the nearby settlement schools, despite the reservations of Danny's

[178] Harry Harrison Kroll, *The Mountainy Singer* (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1928), 21. Macon was an acquittance of Kroll and the two may have toured together, with the former playing songs over screenings of film scripted by the latter. More could be said of the representation of other aged southerners in the text, with 'sour aunties' and 'old women' populating much of the novel: Eric Neil Hermann, '"In The Good Old Days of Long Ago"', 77.

[179] These insights into Kroll's text are found in an interview with him in 'Mountain Writer Is Visitor In City', *Nashville Tennessean*, 4 September 1928, 3; Twelve Southerners, *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (New York and London: Harper, 1930). For more on the Agrarian intellectual movement before and after *I'll Take My Stand*, see Emily Bingham and Thomas A. Underwood, *The Southern Agrarians and the New Deal: Essays After I'll Take My Stand* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2001).

parents. Saxon, like Macon, chased commercial success, navigating the modern South with few of the hang-ups southern intellectuals had about the effects of modernity.[180]

Demographic changes also explain the appeal of an aged Tennessean like Macon. When away on tour, Macon expressed a longing for the culinary culture of 'back home', one that rural-urban migrants shared. An article on Macon in the *Birmingham News*, following an extensive tour in 1926, claimed the old banjoist felt the 'lusty call of the farm', and missed his 'hog jowl and chitterlings, cracklin' bread and sweet potatoes.'[181] In 1942 *Radio Mirror* informed readers that Macon turned down a Northern tour as he would miss the 'old-fashioned fried chicken, turnip greens, or baked Tennessee ham'.[182] Southern foodways, like music, has often acted as a synecdoche for sentiments of home and family. In 1926, the *Tennessean* tapped into this in its explanation of Macon's popularity: 'His character is rich with humor and his folk-songs seem to strike home.'[183] This sense of displacement was heightened by the fact Macon resembled older family members. It is ironic that an *Opry* star upheld traditional southern foodways, given Macon and his colleagues regularly performed on an *Opry* stage draped in the logos of long-term sponsors, Martha White Foods. Inc., who made industrially processed flour and other ready-made processed foods. While the company claimed it sponsored WSM because 'people who make biscuits get up at 5.30am' (and therefore listened to the station's early morning programming), its business model was to supplant local produce and 'home-cooking' and exploit a growing class of urban wage-earners.[184] An aged figure like Macon helped legitimise Martha White as a 'homely'

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[180] For the tensions over Settlement Schools in Appalachia, see David E. Whisnant, *All That Is Native & Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region*, 25th Anniversary Edition (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 17-30. Some of the themes around rural life and old musicians in *Mountainy Singer* were prescient of Donald Donaldson's posthumously-published novel *Big Ballad Jamboree*, written in 1949: Donald Davidson, *Big Ballad Jamboree* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996).
[181] 'Tennessee Banjoist Reminisces', *Birmingham News*, 1 January 1926, quoted in Eric Neil Hermann, '"In The Good Old Days of Long Ago"', 68.
[182] 'What's New From Coast to Coast', *Radio Mirror*, January 1942, 44, 66.
[183] 'Week's Programs', *Nashville Tennessean*, 18 April 1926, 30.
[184] For the ways industrial agribusinesses in the South promoted processed food and consumerism as the path to social mobility, see Angela Jill Cooley, *To Live and Dine in*

company by obfuscating its underlying modern foundations with descriptions of old-fashioned 'home cooking'.

Both Jimmy Thompson and Dave Macon fully adopted their 'Uncle' characters for the benefit of their fans, producers, and sponsors. Both became 'founding fathers' of the *Grand Ole Opry* and the country music tradition within their own lifetimes, and their age was central to this process. What is most revealing about their careers is not how just that age gave them licence and authority to comment on technological changes and the religious and gender politics of the New South, but how their old-timey personalities, paradoxically, were tied to, or used to sell, an idea of modern, consumerist lifestyle, whether symbolised by the automobile, life insurance, or the radio set.

Kentucky Grandmothers: Granny Harper and Ma McCormick

The near absence of aged female acts in old-time music in the 1920s reflects the wider underrepresentation of older women in a sexist and ageist US popular culture and the relative dearth of female artists in old-time music, regardless of age. Still, two elderly female old-time musicians, 'Granny' Harper and 'Ma' McCormick, both Kentuckians who became famous on radio and records in the late 1920s and continued performing into the 1940s and 1950s, are worthy of discussion for both their exceptionality and what their careers can reveal about gendered ideas about old age. [185] One explanation as to why Kentucky laid claim to some of the only elderly female old-time performers is the remarkable popularity of Eliza Calvert Obenchain's *Aunt Jane of Kentucky*, a 1907 collection of short stories about the Old South told from the perspective of an elderly female quiltmaker to an unnamed

Dixie: The Evolution of Urban Food Culture in the South (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2015), 17-25.

[185] Kristine McCusker has explored numerous female acts on barn dance radio. However, generally speaking, women were underrepresented in old time music. While McCusker discusses some aspects of Harper's career, her study focuses more on younger female acts: McCusker, *Lonesome Cowgirls and Honky Tonk Angels*, 133-34.

child. This white, female version of Uncle Remus became hugely popular in the 1900s and 1910s, particularly after the endorsement of President Theodore Roosevelt. In 1932, Kentucky fiddler Bill Shepard even recorded a song called 'Aunt Jane Blues' (Gennett 18344).[186] Also an influential, if distinct model of aged femininity in Kentucky was miners' union activist Aunt Molly Jackson, whose musical performances and advocacy for Harlan County miners reached into the mainstream media in the 1930s. Her persona, unlike either Harper, McCormick, or the fictional Aunt Jane, however, was as both a kindly Aunt and a tough 'pistol-packing mama'.[187]

Both Harper and McCormick were living, if aged versions of the 'sentimental mothers' found in songs and scripted dialogues over barn dance radio.[188] Under four-feet tall, Flora Bell Williams (née Waters) became 'Granny' Harper on Kentucky radio shows for several years before arriving on producer John Lair's *Renfro Valley Barn Dance* in 1939. She danced, sang, and played fiddle and harmonica with such shows until she finally retired in 1958 at the age of 85. Dressed in a hillbilly outfit like those worn by all of Lair's female acts (flowery gingham dress and sunbonnet) but with the notable addition of a cornpipe, Harper looked every bit a rural 'Granny'. Even when audiences could not see Harper, these visual features were described orally, such as when Lair told listeners during a broadcast that her hair was 'white with the snow of many winters'.[189] In publicity photographs her miniature frame and hunched back distinguished her from the pretty 'country girl' look of

[186] Eliza Calvert Hall, *Aunt Jane of Kentucky* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2015). Eliza Calvert Obenchain wrote under the pseudonym 'Hall' and used the friendly image of Aunt Jane to insert some of her suffragist politics: Lynn E. Niedermeier, Eliza Calvert Hall: Kentucky Author and Suffragist (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 120-130.
[187] For the influence of Jackson in popular culture, see Shelly Romalis, *Pistol Packin' Mama: Aunt Molly Jackson and the Politics of Folksong* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 1-30.
[188] McCusker provides a more detailed analysis of the image of the sentimental mother on barn dance radio: McCusker, *Lonesome Cowgirls and Honky Tonk Angels*, 11-13. For a recent assessment of the sentimental mother in old time and race records, see Allan Andrew Symons, 'Male Control and Female Resistance in American Roots Music Recordings of the Interwar Period', 29-74.
[189] 'Remembering Granny Harper', *Renfro Valley Bugle*, March 1992, 13.

her castmates, particularly the young, conventionally attractive Coon Creek Girls.[190] Lair played with the generation gap between the aged Harper and her mostly younger counterparts by giving her infantilised nicknames such as 'Clamor Girl' or the 'Gayest Gal on the Barndance'.[191]

Harper's visual aesthetic was tied to old-fashioned, pastoral imagery: various publicity photographs show her smoking a pipe while fishing, sat next to a spinning wheel, and atop a horse-drawn plough [Appendix 2.20 and 2.21].[192] She was also associated with a gendered idea of home and domesticity. During live shows Harper kept her harmonica in her apron pocket. Other publicity photographs show her sat next to young children [Appendix 2.22].[193] In real life, while Harper was an occasional carer for orphaned children, and well-loved by nieces and nephews, she never had any children of her own. Nevertheless, audiences, and fellow cast members, Lair included, consistently referred to her as 'Granny', reflecting a wider centrality of (grand)child-bearing to conceptions of aged femininity.[194] Ultimately, Harper was an important part of Lair's vision of the cast of Renfro Valley as an extended rural family, but she was still presented as a novelty member to be laughed at rather than with. In 1942, Lair arranged for Harper to be married on-air in a special episode of *Renfro Valley*. The comedic event was a clear parody of the radio weddings that had been

[190] According to different accounts, Harper's kyphosis came either from birth or a childhood accident. Whatever the case, unknowing audiences may well have associated her hunched back with her age: Interview with Old Joe Clark, by John Rumble, 5 December 1985, Country Music Foundation Oral History Project, Country Music Hall of Fame Archives (hereafter CMHFA), Nashville, Tennessee.
[191] Typescript note, 'Granny Harper', c. 1950s, Series 3, John Lair Papers, Berea College Special Collections and Archives (hereafter BCSCA), Berea College, Berea, Kentucky.
[192] Postcard, 'Granny Harper Fishin' for 'A Big One' in Renfro Creek', 1940, in Ronald Morgan Postcard Collection, Kentucky Historical Society, available at http://www.kyhistory.com/cdm/ref/collection/Morgan/id/4982, accessed 8 September 2019; Publicity photograph, 'Granny Harper', 14 April 1941, Series 8, John Lair Papers, BCSCA; Publicity photograph, Granny Harper, c. 1949, reprinted in Pete Stamper, *It All Happened in Renfro Valley* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 50.
[193] Publicity photograph, Granny Harper and children, c. 1940s, Series 8, John Lair Papers, BCSCA.
[194] Harper's immediate family referred to her as 'Aunt': Sandy Ramsey, 'Remembering Fiddle-Playin' Granny Harper', *Renfro Valley Bugle*, August 2005, 1; Publicity photograph, 'Granny Harper and children', c. 1941, Series 8, John Lair Papers, BCSCA.

common since the early 1920s, but which had accelerated on the outbreak of the Second World War. It is unclear whether the radio wedding played with ideas of Harper as either an 'old maid' or a widow (considering she was a 'Granny'); whatever the case, the broadcast built on longstanding sexist comedic tropes of older women as desperate to be (re)married.[195]

Even Harper's sound was 'old'. A 1953 Lair script reads: 'Age has made her voice high-pitched and liable to waiver a bit on the high notes, but it has not dimmed her smile or slowed her nimble feet. You'll take to Granny the minute you see her.'[196] Harper seemingly never cut any records, but a 1948 radio transcription recording gives an impression of the aged timbre of her singing. The live audience laugh at her thin, cartoonishly out-of-key singing and her shrill harmonica. Like Harper's male counterparts, a surprising sense of vitality was an essential part of her act, particularly her dancing which can just about be heard during the same recording amongst exagerated calls of encouragement from bandmates ('let's go there granny!') and Lair ('Granny show your pep now!'). After Harper finishes, Lair jokes that 'Granny's finally entering in the spirit things'.[197] If Lair exaggerated her dancing prowess for comic effect by telling audiences she could 'execute the fastest jig in seven counties', photographs of Harper dancing onstage do suggest that she was a vigorous dancer for her age [Appendix 2.23 and 2.24].[198] Like old fiddlers, Harper simultaneously was presented as aged but energetic. A poster for a *Renfro Valley Barn Dance* stage show in the 1950s features Granny Harper's name on the billing with the

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[195] Sandy Ramsey, 'Remembering Fiddle-Playin' Granny Harper', *Renfro Valley Bugle*, August 2005, 1. For radio weddings, see Timothy D. Taylor, 'Music and the Rise of Radio in Twenties America: Technological Imperialism, Socialization, and the Transformation of Intimacy', in *Wired for Sound: Engineering and Technologies in Sonic Cultures*, ed. Paul D. Greene and Thomas Porcello (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2010), 254.

[196] Typescript note, 'Granny Harper', c. 1950s, Series 3, John Lair Papers, BCSCA.

[197] Radio transcription recording, 'Renfro Valley Barn Dance', WHAS, Louisville, Kentucky, 27 November 1948, Folder 28, Box 90, Series 10, John Lair Papers, BCSCA.

[198] Loyal Jones, *Country Music Humorists and Comedians* (Champaign, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 196. For images of Harper dancing, see 'Renfro Valley Folks', *Radio Mirror*, December 1951, 42-43; Publicity photograph, 'Granny Harper on stage with Slim Miller and band', c. 1941, Series 8, John Lair Papers, BCSCA.

subtitle '80 Years Old - Still Going Strong.'[199] In a similar vein, a Lair-penned souvenir postcard from 1940 stressed that

> Although almost seventy, Granny Harper is 'the life of the party' … [and] cuts the Pigeon Wing with the best of them. A native of the Kentucky Mountains, she sings, in a high pitched, quavering voice, the songs and ballads of the pioneer days.[200]

As this text suggests, if Lair presented Harper as a comedically 'peppy' old woman, he also chose his moments to present her with the dignity that befitted the older woman. In his introduction to the 1939 performance of *Renfro Valley* stars for the Roosevelts and King George VI in the White House, Lair explained that Harper's thin voice makes up in 'vigor and determination all that it may have lost in music during the passing years'.[201] Audiences also reacted favourably to this marketing. A reviewer of a 1940 Columbia Theater performance noted how 'Granny Harper is in her seventies but gives the folks a bit of old-time fiddling and sings old-time songs … [and won] loud applause with her old-time steps.'[202]

Unlike other male acts, no surviving publicity materials features Harper's own 'voice'. Her relationship with the occasionally controlling Lair was not always congenial. In a 1941 letter to a colleague, Lair wrote that 'Granny, the old jitterbug, don't seem to want to come [on tour]. I'll let her drop off here a little and she'll be anxious later on if we still want her.' Kristine McCusker concedes that such exploitative incentivisation was a common method for producers, Lair especially, to exert authority and control the behaviour of their staff, whether male or female.[203] However, the acutely patronising sense of entitlement in Lair's letter reveals not only his sexist, but ageist outlook. Lair clearly felt Harper's

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[199] Poster, 'Renfro Valley Folks', c. 1953, Hatch Show Print Collections, CMHOF.
[200] Postcard, 'Granny Harper Fishin' for 'A Big One' in Renfro Creek', 1940, in Ronald Morgan Postcard Collection, Kentucky Historical Society, available at http://www.kyhistory.com/cdm/ref/collection/Morgan/id/4982, accessed 8 September 2019.
[201] Sandy Ramsey, 'Remembering Fiddle-Playin' Granny Harper', *Renfro Valley Bugle*, August 2005, 1.
[202] Rex McConnell, 'Renfro Valley Barn Dance', *Billboard*, 17 August 1940, 23.
[203] McCusker, *Lonesome Cowgirls and Honky Tonk Angels*, 133-134.

stubbornness was a symptom of age, rather than an artist merely expressing a legitimate desire to protect her interests. The reasons why Harper resisted joining the tour are not clear. It might be assumed that Lair's financial offer was not worth the exhausting effort it took for the elderly woman to travel. However, Harper repeatedly proved herself capable of travelling long distances. In 1942, Harper performed at below-zero temperatures shows with only wartime food rationing during a Cincinnati canvas tent show tour.[204] In 1949, she braved the over-800 mile journey from Kentucky to Florida with the *Renfro Valley* troupe.[205] However, a missed Ohio appearance due to illness in 1942 suggests age-related debility or perhaps the disability of Harper's spinal disorder were barriers for the performer.[206]

Despite these issues, Harper was one of the most well-paid and regular performers on *Renfro Valley.* Cast member Manuel 'Old' Joe Clark claimed Harper made $200 a week, and was wealthy enough to own several properties.[207] What Clark called Harper's 'fancy price', along with the relatively high billing she received as a principal star of the *Renfro Valley* roadshow, suggests Lair valued her contribution to the show, and for good reason: her very presence legitimised the entire nostalgic ethos of *Renfro Valley*. In a *Radio Varieties* article about how Lair was turning the 'clock back 50 years' in his endeavour to stage a barn dance radio broadcast from a schoolhouse near Renfro Creek, Harper stands in front and centre of the cast photograph.[208] Harper may have been a novelty act, but she was the only cast member old enough to have been playing music fifty years before.

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[204] 'Renfro Valley Tenter Socks 'Em In Cincy Area Despite Inclemency', *Billboard*, 3 October 1942, 27. Ironically, considering Harper's weather-beating efforts in Cincinnati, a 1941 broadcast features a skit involving a cast member fetching a winter coat for the 'freezing' Granny: Radio transcription recording, 'Renfro Valley Barn Dance' WLW, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1 March 1941, Folder 5, Box 80, Series 9, John Lair Papers, BCSCA.
[205] 'Folk Talent and Tunes', *Billboard*, 5 March 1949, 33.
[206] 'Northeastern Ohio Socko for Renfro; May Prolong Tour', *Billboard*, 8 August 1942, 27.
[207] Interview with Old Joe Clark, by John Rumble, 5 December 1985, Country Music Foundation Oral History Project, CMHFA.
[208] Jules Cass, 'Renfro Valley Folks: Hill Billy Life and Music of Long Ago Lives Again in Kentucky's Renfro Valley', *Radio Varieties*, October 1940, 16.

Ever sensitive to audience letters and the radio press, Lair would have been aware of how fans appreciated Harper. In 1946, *National Hill-Billy News*, a short-lived magazine published by fans, for fans, described Harper as a 'grand old trouper, 74 years young'. Like loving grandchildren, the editors promised to 'drop in on her some day for a nice visit.'[209] Of course, Harper's importance on the show cannot be reduced to just her age. She was undeniably an impressive musician, popular entertainer, and, despite her 'Granny' persona, an astute businesswoman. Once, after reading that *Renfro Valley* was suffering losses, Harper demanded that the box office paid her salary in advance of her performance.[210]

Throughout the Depression, Clarence (Pa) and Alice (Ma) McCormick from Owenton, Kentucky brought their humour and songs to the *Top O' The Morning* and *Boone County Jamboree* shows on WLW, Cincinnati. 'Ma' and 'Pa' are notable as one of the few aged double acts from this period, and their long-lasting real-life marriage was integral to their shared public identity.[211] The couple used parental titles for stage names and called their various young bandmates their 'adopted sons'. [212] In doing so, they promoted the durability of marriage, an institution many felt was under attack. The on-air celebration of their 46th wedding anniversary, broadcast live from WLW studios, which was a more serious, emotional affair than Harper's radio wedding, endorsed marriage at a time when many feared the effects of a rise of divorce rates on the very structure of the American family [Appendix 2.25].[213] Between 1900 and 1935, national divorce rates doubled, a trend

[209] Nicola and Rose Fantetti, 'Behind The Scenes', *National Hill-Billy News*, February 1946, 10.
[210] McCusker, *Lonesome Cowgirls and Honky Tonk Angels*, 134.
[211] The popular McCormick act was likely the inspiration for a similar-looking elderly couple on the *National Barn Dance*, although the identity of this act is unclear: Photograph, 'WLS Barn Dance', 1944, BIO-PR-00123, Photographs Collection, CPM.
[212] The familial title was made doubly clear in a souvenir postcard featuring with a photograph of the pair captioned as 'Pa and Ma McCormick (Dad and Mother)': 'Grandpa Jones - Top O the Morning Gang - The Suppertime Frolic Folks', c. 1930, BIO-CD-00018, Photographs Collection, CPM. The Old Fiddlers band were referred to as the McCormicks 'adopted sons': *Newark Advocate* [Newark, OH], 28 April 1937, 2.
[213] *Dayton Daily News* [Dayton, Ohio], 18 November 1932, 16; *Rural Radio*, November 1938, 17

broadly replicated in most southern states and Ohio, where the show was based.[214] The image of an *older* couple proved that marriages could last. *Radio Digest* reported in 1931 that Ma told them 'she married Pa when he was 25 and that was 33 years ago.'[215] That it was Ma and not Pa extolling the longevity of their marriage is equally significant. Although many barriers still existed, the granting of divorces to wives increased by 20 percent in the McCormick's home state of Kentucky over the years they were married, a steeper rise than in most other states.[216] Publicity photographs of the patriarch McCormick sat in large chair with obedient wife standing by his side, or dressed with a headscarf to make her appear almost like a puritan, reinforced visually traditional gender roles [Appendix 2.26].[217]

Even their choice of instruments reemphasised the domesticity of older women. Pa played the harmonica and fiddle, portable instruments associated with mobility, while Ma played the upright piano, a stationary instrument linked to domesticity. However, the McCormicks usually were hosts, sidekicks, or comic foils, rather than musicians. They played frequently with younger musicians such as Brown County Revellers or the McCormick Fiddlers. Both these acts brought the pair onstage at regular interludes to indulge in what *Variety* magazine referred to as 'barn dance capering'.[218] When the couple did perform music, however, their songs were identified as 'older'. At one show, the

[214] This trend was only interrupted by the Great Depression, which briefly flatlined the otherwise exponential rise of divorce rates over the preceding decades: Samuel A. Stouffer and Lyle M. Spencer, 'Marriage and Divorce in Recent Years', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 188 (November 1936): 59.
[215] 'McCormick Fiddlers', *Radio Digest*, 17 September 1931, 68.
[216] Glenda Riley, *Divorce: An American Tradition* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 130-182.
[217] Signed photograph reprinted in Michael A. Martini, *Cincinnati Radio* (Mount Pleasant, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 2011), 85; WLW leaflet, 'WLW - The Nation's Station', c. 1940, reprinted in Randy McNutt, *The Cincinnati Sound* (Mount Pleasant, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 2007), 12.
[218] 'Variety House Reviews', *Variety*, 14 April 1937, 65.

Revellers played ‘fast numbers’ interspersed with an ‘old-fashioned dance number’ from the McCormicks.[219]

For some in the press, the elderly pair represented a refreshing breath of authenticity in a ‘hillbilly’ industry populated by professional fakes. *Radio Digest* introduced readers to the McCormicks by first describing who they were *not*:

> Some of these so-called ‘old time fiddlers,’ ‘mountaineers,’ and ‘hill-billies’ are only Big City tuba players filling in time. They live in hall bedrooms in the tenement districts and never saw the mountains this side of the ocean … you can't say that about the McCormick Fiddlers.[220]

The McCormick’s collective years legitimised their authenticity as real mountain folk, even when their actions did not always meet the required criteria. ‘Out of character though it is’, the *Radio Digest* article continued, with a cartoon of the homely ‘Ma’ McCormick sat at her piano with ‘Pa’ and their band standing beside her, ‘they travel in a green and cream Packard sedan’.[221]

The McCormicks were especially well appreciated in their home state of Kentucky. In 1939, listener Janey Fuqua from Bonnieville wrote to *Rural Radio* to express her love for the *Top of the Morning* programme. She thanked the magazine for printing a picture of the McCormicks in a previous issue, the photograph alone making the magazine ‘worth a dollar’.[222] If their southern entertainment broadcast from a Cincinnati station was appreciated back home, it was largely intended for listeners in Ohio, who clearly shared some rural common ground. A press release concerning an early morning ‘hillbilly’

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[219] ‘Variety House Reviews’, *Variety*, 23 June 1937, 59. Clarence McCormick regularly closed the McCormick live show by dancing the *schottische* with his wife: ‘The Final Curtain’, *Billboard*, 16 June 1945, 36. The pair made few recordings. In 1929, the couple travelled to Richmond, Indiana to record for Gennett as the Blue Ridge Mountaineers, one of numerous ad hoc recording groups named after the Kentucky mountain region. The two instrumentals the band recorded in 1929, ‘Old Flannigan’ and ‘Old Voile’ (Gennett 6870), were familiar dance pieces in region, and labelled ‘Old-Time Playin’’ on the record.
[220] ‘McCormick Fiddlers’, *Radio Digest*, 17 September 1931, 68.
[221] Ibid.
[222] ‘Radio Farm Digest’, *Rural Radio*, June 1939, 24.

programme hosted by the McCormicks on WLW explained that the show was geared primarily towards 'farm folk, truck transport drivers, all-night workers and restaurants'.[223]

WLW's audience lay across the pejoratively labelled 'Hillbilly Highway', the highways and travel networks that facilitated outward southern white migration, and cargo transport of coal and other southern produce from the Appalachian Mountain regions to the northern metropoles. Homesick southerners both travelled these routes and settled in cities like Cincinnati, where local bigotry against 'hillbillies' abounded. These listeners had keen ears for WLW's old-time music and nostalgic entertainment that reminded them of their own communities in the South. Pa and Ma stood in for real elderly (grand)parents of the southern diaspora. Promotional photographs of the barn dance show casts in which the elderly pair stood together at the edge of the a rag-tag crew of hillbilly characters would have resonated with some of their listeners [Appendix 2.27].[224] This is not to say that rural or even urban listeners of Ohio and neighbouring states did not also appreciate the McCormicks, but simply that WLW likely recognised how southern migrants in the state would have appreciated the old couple. Again, behind their career lay a financial interest. Royal Consolidated Drug Trades Products, who sponsored barn dance radio shows from Tijuana to Chicago, specifically funded 'Pa' and 'Ma' McCormick segments for six hours a week on WLW in 1937.[225] Royal Consolidated feasibly were aware that the same audience that enjoyed the McCormicks were newly-arrived rural-urban migrants to an urban wage economy and older listeners keen for old-time entertainment, both growing consumer bases for pharmaceuticals.

For all their popularity, the McCormicks faced certain difficulties being old on radio. As fellow cast member Ramona Jones recalled

> the oldest performers on WLW at the time were Pa and Ma McCormick … The McCormicks were probably on the station because WLW wanted every age group represented. I like the idea of having some older people

[223] 'WLW Silence Cut Down', *Variety*, 9 October 1940, 34.
[224] Martini, *Cincinnati Radio*, 86.
[225] 'New Business', *Radio Daily*, 20 December 1937, 6.

> and some young ones on a program, but it was pretty hard for Pa and Ma to get there for the early morning radio shows. One time she came down with one shoe of one kind and one of other. She was at the age that she could hardly dress herself and look presentable at such early hours.[226]

As *Top O' The Morning* was primarily aimed towards farm workers, who tended to work from dawn, performers were required to be at the studio for 4.30am. For elderly performers, the broadcasting world was less of an 'enabling environment' than recording studios, where sessions, if occasionally long, were at least during the daytime and not daily or weekly commitments.[227] In 1939, the McCormicks were involved in a serious car accident while driving in the early hours to a rehearsal in Kenton County, Kentucky for the *Boone County Jamboree*. Though the cause of their accident was not necessarily age related, the collective injuries the old pair endured, including rib fractures, cuts to the face, and aching arms, would have been particularly impactful because they were older. Despite such risks, the McCormicks continued performing at WLW until ill health halted Clarence from performing a few months before his death in 1945.[228] However, despite the physical risks of working in radio, it provided a security and joy that appealed to the aged couple. After several years of success on the show, managers at WLW offered them a retirement package, but the pair refused it, claiming they preferred to keep working.[229]

Granny Harper and Ma McCormick both appealed to ideas of elderly (grand)mothers of the Kentucky mountains that many audiences in northern Appalachia could relate to. They were distinct visions of aged femininity: Harper was a comic, dancing

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[226] Ramona Jones and W.K. McNeil, *Make Music While You Can* (Madison, North Carolina: Empire Publishing, 2000), 41.

[227] For the concept of an 'enabling environment' in the context of ageing and disability, see Ann MacFarlane, 'Disability and Ageing', in *Disabling Barriers, Enabling Environments*, ed. Carol Thomas et al., Second Edition (London: Sage Publications, 2004), 189-194. Just as gruelling for elderly radio artists were Saturday night barn dance programmes which went on well into the night and even the early hours of the morning. Tennessean fiddler Uncle Am Stuart played over WRC until 2.30am while in his seventies. Uncle Dave Macon performed well past 11pm: 'Fiddling Contest Over WRC Tonight', 27; *The Microphone*, 21 August 1934, 2.

[228] 'The Final Curtain', *Billboard*, 16 June 1945, 36.

[229] Alton Delmore, *Truth Is Stranger Than Publicity*, Second Edition (Nashville, Tennessee: Country Music Foundation Press, 1995), 272-273.

novelty; Ma, partly because of her inseparable stage relationship to her husband, was a more serious exemplar of the sentimental mother. Notions of the home, family, and marriage (or in Harper's case, her *non*-married status) were more essential aspects of their stage personae than their male counterparts discussed in this chapter. If older male and older female acts shared some tropes relating to intergenerational ties and surprising vibrancy, the former were not as defined in their older age by their marital relations.

Conclusion

This overview of fiddlers on radio and records and closer analysis of the careers of these six elderly old-time acts reveals the potentially myriad meanings of age in old-time music. Older musicians could signify whichever 'past' they or the listener desired: the Old South, the Confederacy, the southwestern frontier, the Appalachian Mountains, civic and state identity, rural ways of life, traditional values relating to gender, race, religion, class, and the family, and even quotidian but 'old-fashioned' activities such as home cooking. As with Macon's department store radio performance alongside an Arden representative, what is significant is that these associations between an aged artist and antimodernist tropes were made *within* modern media and consumerist frameworks. Ironically, these identifiably 'premodern' performers were frequently used to sell modern products, from pharmaceuticals to life insurance, and ease tensions over modern phenomena such as female governors or migratory living.

This chapter has also highlighted other tensions for the performers themselves. Older musicians benefited from the cultural meanings attached to their age, but many still suffered from various physical infirmities and struggled through generational ambivalence towards new technology and industry practices. Nevertheless, most of the artists discussed here traversed the new domains of radio and records with astonishing fluidity, ease, and, contrary to the assumptions of music historians, enthusiasm for the opportunities the new sound industries could offer them. A further ambiguity this chapter illustrates is how transregional

ties embedded age into southern old-time music. Many artists came from Texas and Kentucky, states with their own local, sub-regional identities that do not fit neatly into stereotypical ideas of the South, and whose cultures bled more fluidly with the West, Mexico, and Midwest. Equally, elderly Tennessean musicians were heard and loved across the nation. Conspicuously absent from this chapter are many older musicians on records or radio who hailed from the mill towns of the Piedmont, where, Patrick Huber argues, the vernacular styles that constituted old-time music were developed and nurtured.[230]

Evidently, the age dimension of old fiddlers' contests and veteran culture transferred onto radio and records. Still, it is significant that, as Charles Wolfe shows, the fiddlers who recorded the most during this period, unlike at contests, were forty or younger: 'Many of the really successful stars of old-time music were, in fact, brash young men who could readily adopt their styles and repertoires to the demands of the new age's commercialism and media.'[231] This fact is partly explained by the fact that many elderly musicians died before they could record more music, but it is also a reminder that older performers essentially were *novel* fixtures of old-time music. Still, they were present at some of the key historical junctures in the new genre, such as the 'first' records and broadcasts of vernacular southern musics in the South, and became central performers in some of the genre's towering early institutions such as the *Opry* and *Renfro Valley*. As such, this chapter prompts a reconfiguration of how historians view the development of early old-time music. The proportionally small but significant influx of older musicians into stations and recording studios in the 1920s was as much the *cause* of the marketing of vernacular southern music as 'old-time' as its *effect*.

[230] Huber, *Linthead Stomp*, 1-42.
[231] Of the approximately 300 fiddlers who recorded between 1922 and 1942, the following young or middle-aged fiddled waxed the most sides: Clayton McMichen (175), John Carson (170), Doc Roberts (80), Kessinger Bros (70), Willie Narmour (50), Bob Wills (49), Stripling Bros (46), Cliff Gross (43),
Arthur Smith (30): Wolfe, *The Devil's Box*, xx-xxi.

In the 1930s, after this initial flurry of 'agedness' in old-time music in the 1920s, aged old-time artists became a rarer feature of records and radio. Certainly, some aged artists, like the McCormicks, Granny Harper and Uncle Dave Macon, continued to perform into the 1930 and 1940s. However, the recording and broadcasting of dozens of old fiddlers that had characterised 1920s old-time music more or less petered out by the onset of the Great Depression. Something, or rather some things, had clearly changed. While it is difficult to say precisely what caused the relative but discernible decline of the vogue for genuinely aged old-time performers, some factors seem to have been particularly significant in this process. Firstly, the Depression had a particularly pernicious effect on older Americans, who lost savings, saw property value plummet, and watched helpless as their businesses or wages were hit by a deteriorating economy. In this context, there were fewer old performers in the early 1930s who, like Macon and Bonner in the early 1920s, had personal savings to allow them to make a late life career move. Life was already hard for many in the South before the Depression, but its immediate effects, which for farmers were compounded by a series of environmental crises and long-term stagnation, were to accentuate already difficult economic and career considerations for many southerners.[232] Considering the medical and generational barriers many of the artists in this chapter had to overcome to make records or broadcasts, it is feasible that the economic effects of the Depression made it even harder for aged musicians to make the leap into commercial old-time music.

The economic crisis had two other effects on older musicians. In the 1930s, partly due to new economic limitations, but also changing music industry practices, particularly relating to market research, producers, and A&R personnel, old-time, or increasingly

[232] For the impacts of the Depression on the aged, see Haber and Gratton, *Old Age and the Search for Security*, 42-47. For the complex impacts of the Depression in the South, see Alison Collis Greene, *No Depression in Heaven: The Great Depression, the New Deal, and the Transformation of Religion in the Delta* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Kenneth J. Bindas, *Remembering the Great Depression in the Rural South* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007); Anthony J. Badger, *The New Deal: The Depression Years, 1933-1940* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), 26-27. For a historiographical take on the Great Depression, see Aaron D. Purcell, ed., *The New Deal and the Great Depression* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2014).

'hillbilly', music became slicker. Young professionals, generally speaking, were more able and willing to adapt. As this chapter has shown, if some older musicians were remarkably eager and able to play on radio and make records, some were resistant to changes or instructions from young producers; many became ill or died within a few years of fame. It is possible that some industry professionals, echoing ageist practices in other workplaces at the time, increasingly viewed aged musicians as 'inefficient' and therefore not 'profitable'. Whatever the reasoning, older old-time musicians became more marginalised in an industry that gradually favoured young, attractive 'stars'.[233]

Finally, the Depression and the New Deal agenda that followed it provoked serious concerns about the way society treated its elderly. The proliferation of exagsgerated, if not unfounded scare narratives about the almshouse was emblematic of these wider concerns. In *The Need for Economic Security in the United States*, a 1934 report by the Committee on Economic Security, commissioned by President Roosevelt, illustrations of gloomy silhouetted elderly men with canes sit alongside a warning that the 'predominance of the aged in almshouses … is a sign of their increasing dependency.'[234] Although it might be assumed that honouring elders in the musical realm would be an obvious way to alleviate such concerns, the following chapter shows that in old-time music, southerners and Americans gradually turned away from enjoying aged musicians, and instead consumed more fantastical representations of old age. Comedic fictional depictions of old age avoided the age issues, cultural baggage, and even social guilt associated with real aged performers

[233] The turn to youth in old-time music became particularly acute in the 1940s and 1950s as 'country music' gradually replaced 'hillbilly' and 'old-time' labels, but this process began following the Depression: Jeffrey J. Lange, *Smile When You Call Me a Hillbilly: Country Music's Struggle for Respectability, 1939-1954* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 1-18.

[234] Committee on Economic Security, *The Need for Economic Security in the United States* (Washington D.C.: United States Government, 1934), available from https://www.ssa.gov/history/reports/ces.html, accessed 12 September 2019. The images in the original report are reprinted in Haber and Gratton, *Old Age and the Search for Security*, 92.

in a culture rife which gloomy, pessimistic depictions of later life, and a population hungry for escapism.

Chapter Three

Old-Timers: Age Masquerade on Barn Dance Radio

In February 1998, three veteran country musicians, Manuel 'Old Joe' Clark, Louis Marshal 'Grandpa' Jones, and Ballard 'Grandpappy Nerit' Taylor, all passed away. Over their careers, these southerners had performed in high school auditoriums in the Depression-era South, promoted household products and the war effort over radio shows such as *Renfro Valley Barn Dance* and the *Grand Ole Opry* in the 1930s and 1940s, and appeared in movies and on network television after the war. Considering their popularity and longevity, few have asked one seemingly obvious question: why these *young* performers dressed and behaved as explicitly *old* characters. Even less scrutinised are the dozens of other less known acts who wore grey wigs and performed comedic old-fashioned personae over barn dance radio.[1]

This chapter reveals that, far from being anomalies, most barn dance shows had a fake 'Uncle', 'Aunt' or 'Pappy' as a part of their cast. Aside from the three already mentioned, other well-known acts included Patrick Barrett as Uncle Ezra (WLS's *National Barn Dance* in Chicago), Archie Campbell as Grandpappy (WNOX's *Midday Merry-Go-Round* in Knoxville, Tennessee), Aunt Idy (WHAS's *Renfro Valley Barn Dance* in Louisville, Kentucky) and Lonnie 'Pap' Wilson (WSM's *Grand Ole Opry* in Nashville, Tennessee). Some performers whose names are perhaps obscure even for country fans, such as 'Uncle' Henry Warren (bandleader of the Original Kentucky Mountaineers), and Ralph 'Grandpappy' Carden (WDVA's *Virginia Barn Dance* in Danville, Virginia), nevertheless were popular entertainers in their day. Due in part to a wider underappreciation of the

[1] Loyal Jones sketched out the parallel careers of these three performers not along after their deaths, though devoted only a few lines to their aged personae: Loyal Jones, 'Death Comes in Threes', *Appalachian Heritage* 26, no. 3 (Summer 1998): 23-29.

cultural meanings behind 'country music comedy', to date there has been no scholarly account of the collective existence, let alone significances, of these 'aged' acts.[2]

That contemporaries had no agreed collective name for this kind of act demonstrates how unquestioned this peculiar phenomenon has been. For consistency, the phrase 'old-timer', which was occasionally used in contemporary promotional materials, will be used in this chapter to refer to the act, and 'age masquerade' to the practice.[3] Granted, many contemporaries may not have considered all 'old-timer' acts as cut from the same cloth. The lascivious personality of Campbell's Grandpappy was easily distinguishable from the philosophical Uncle Ezra, or the hot-tempered Aunt Idy. Still, as a concept, age masquerade is useful in highlighting how a sense of performed agedness ultimately bound together these otherwise distinct performers. They all purposefully distinguished themselves from other cast members by their 'age'.[4]

This chapter is bookended by two artificial, but not arbitrary points in time. From 1928, when Uncle Ezra became one of the first popular old-timer acts on radio, let alone barn dance programming, to 1958, when Archie Campbell dropped his Grandpappy act, age masquerade was more or less an ubiquitous phenomenon on barn dance radio. This is not to

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[2] Loyal Jones argues that country music comedy has been neglected due to later trends in the industry to legitimise the genre as an 'art' by presenting musicians as serious artists rather than entertainers: Loyal Jones, *Country Music Humorists and Comedians* (Champaign, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 1-20.

[3] 'Pappy', 'old man' or 'old-timer' were the most common names for such characters in promotional materials. For example, Archie Campbell referred to his Grandpappy persona as an 'old man character', John Lair introduced Old Joe Clark as 'one of the old-timers', and Hank and Herb were referred to as The Old-Timers: Interview with Archie Campbell, with John Rumble, 1 February 1968, Country Music Foundation Oral History Project, CMHFA; Radio transcription recording, '*Renfro Valley Barn Dance',* WHAS, Louisville, Kentucky, 22 August 1964, Folder 7, Box 81, Series 9, John Lair Papers, BCSCA; 'Over the Cracker Barrel', *Rural Radio*, December 1938, 21.

[4] Other terms could be given for the practice: 'age transvestism', for example, has been used by scholars in the context of children in the entertainment industry; 'age minstrelsy' could be a valid term considering the historical relationship between country music and blackface minstrelsy. However, 'age masquerade' is sufficiently self-explanatory, all-encompassing, and devoid of excessive scholarly and cultural baggage: Marah Gubar, 'Who Watched The Children's Pinafore? Age Transvestism on the Nineteenth-Century Stage', *Victorian Studies* 54, no. 3 (2012): 410-26.

say that similar acts did not predate or follow this period; indeed, the antecedents and decedents of age masquerade are briefly discussed in this chapter. Yet, in no other period have old-timer acts in country music, or any other genre, achieved the same popularity, and nor have so many been performing at the same time.

A unique sequence and combination of historical circumstances collectively fostered an enthusiastic audience for the kind of nostalgic and escapist entertainment that age masquerade literally embodied. The Depression was the spark, but the Second World War, the accelerated movement towards an increasingly consumerist, technological and urban-centred society, the continued economic hardship and occasional prejudice experienced by poorer white southerners and rural Americans, and steady challenges to the hierarchies of gender and race all played their part to varying degrees. This chapter shows that old-timer acts rather prosaically appealed to portions of US society, old and young, who were conscious of, or concerned about profound cultural, economic, social, and demographic transitions underway in southern and US society.

A primary underlying cause for the initial development of age masquerade was the Depression and the movement towards Social Security during the New Deal years. The Depression hit the elderly disproportionally hard, particularly those without savings and pensions, but the southern aged faced especially hard times: in 1934, an elderly man from Webbville, Kentucky who signed his name 'J. C. G.' wrote to First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt to explain how he was 'destitute of food and raiment. With no income no relation able to help me [sic].'[5] Such stories were common fare in popular culture during the 1930s as the principle of Social Security was discussed and made into law, and as pension organisations, many of which had begun their efforts in the 1920s, advocated for the aged with greater

[5] The letter writer had read the president's speech about old age pensions a few days before and wrote to the First Lady because 'women is more sympathetic than men for the old and distressed people': J. C. G., letter to Eleanor Roosevelt, 1934, reprinted in Robert S. McElvaine, ed., *Down and Out in the Great Depression: Letters from the Forgotten Man* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 103.

force and impact. Accompanying these seismic economic and political shifts for the aged came a great surge in cultural depictions of old age, both sympathetic and disparaging. A cartoon by Gregor Duncan in *LIFE* magazine in 1935 expressed the broadly anti-New Deal agenda of the publication with an image of an old man sitting comfortably on a rocking chair held up by 'everyday man'.[6] Stories of generational animosities, reflective of the largely undesired movement out of necessity of many impoverished aged Americans and unemployed youth into complex intergenerational housing arrangements, were common features of Depression-era family life, particularly in the South, and reproduced in popular culture.[7] Age masquerade was a product of a period that saw a surge in cultural representations of the elderly, broadly categorizable into two antithetical models: as vulnerable citizens who should be valued for their contributions to society; or as a burden on the state. As this chapter shows, old-timer acts did not easily fit into either model, but generally reflected an era in which the aged became a more fixed focus within the national discourse.

Due partly to this national context, while most old-timer acts were white male southerners, there were non-southern exceptions. The Midwest, with its vast rural population, greater number of radio owners, and prosperous radio industry was an equally, or by some accounts *more*, important, locus of barn dance radio. As such, the region also produced a number of old-timer acts, not least the Illinoisan character of Uncle Ezra on WLS's *National Barn Dance*, and the 'bewhiskered' Uncle Fezz over WOWO's *Hoosier Hop* in Fort Wayne, Indiana.[8] It would be wrong to ignore the differences between these acts

[6] Gregor Duncan, 'Ol' Rockin' Chair', *LIFE*, March 1935, 102.
[7] Haber and Gratton demonstrate that many Depression-era families 'doubled up' to cut expenses and in so doing 'relinquished the ideals of separate households and privacy for simple subsistence … Nowhere was this more true than in the South': Carole Haber and Brian Gratton, *Old Age and the Search for Security: An American Social History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 43.
[8] Added to this is also the Old Man from the Mountain, or Grand-Pap, an old-timer character with the Hoosier Corn Huskers over Pennsylvania station WRAK: 'American Folk Tunes', *Billboard*, 22 December 1945, 77; Sammy Forsmark, 'Down the Smoky Mountain Trail', *Mountain Broadcast and Prairie Recorder*, September 1940, 12 .Chad Berry argues

and their southern counterparts, but this chapter argues that many Midwest stations and their old-timer acts had, in Bill Malone's words, 'a special relationship to the South'.[9] Southern migration to the Midwest was key to this relationship. Fezz, for example, was referred to as 'Hoosier', a label which historically connotated an Indianan with genealogical or cultural ties to white southern migrants. Barratt, who played Ezra, publicly discussed his upbringing in rural Missouri, a border state torn between southern and midwestern identities.[10] The *National Barn Dance* featured numerous southern musicians and songs associated with the South, regardless of its connections to the Midwest.[11] Ultimately, if some old-timer characters were not 'southern' in any concrete sense, most were conduits of 'southern' music who appealed to white working-class southerners and displaced southern migrants, and existed in a romanticised rural imaginary that was dominated by the mountains, hillbillies and old-time music of the South.

The same explanations for the lack of genuinely old African American acts in the race music industry can be reapplied to explain the apparent absence of fake elderly African American acts. Indeed, it is even more understandable why age masquerade did not sit well with the 'newness' of black progress. As this chapter shows, there were direct ties between blackface minstrelsy and age masquerade that meant many African Americans would have associated the practicing of 'ageing up' with 'blacking up'. However, the few examples

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that barn dance radio was, in general, 'more rural than southern'. By 1930, half of midwestern farm families owned radios, compared to 10 percent of southern families. Still, this disparity closed during the twentieth century and even listeners in the South who did not own a radio often participated communally by going to the homes of neighbors to hear their favourite barn dance shows: Chad Berry, *The Hayloft Gang: The Story of the National Barn Dance* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 3; Mary A. Bufwack, *Finding Her Voice: Women in Country Music* (Nashville, Tennessee: Country Music Foundation Press, 2003), 80; Richard A Peterson, *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 100.

[9] Bill C. Malone, '"The Southern Thesis": Revisited and Reaffirmed', *Journal of American Folklore* 127, no. 504 (24 April 2014): 226-229.

[10] Edythe Dixon, 'They Said He Couldn't Farm! WLS's Uncle Ezra of National Barn Dance', *Rural Radio*, May 1938, 5.

[11] Gregory S. Rose, 'Upland Southerners: The County Origins of Southern Migrants to Indiana by 1850', *Indiana Magazine of History* 82, no. 3 (September 1986): 242-263; Scott Herring, 'The Hoosier Apex', *Southern Communication Journal* 74, no. 3 (28 July 2009): 243-251.

sprinkled through this chapter of whites performing as aged black characters suggests that the legacy of the 'agefied' model of blackface minstrelsy continued to appeal to white audiences.

Aside from Aunt Idy and a few less-famous characters, most old-timer acts were men playing men. While there were many 'spinster' characters on barn dance radio, such as Minnie Pearl, Aunt Poodie, and Tillie Bloggs that were relatively older than other female acts, their age was less obvious a feature of their character than their male counterparts. Few had grey wigs or canes. It is notable, however, that male old-timer acts often made jokes about their unattractive old wives (who they discussed, but never featured on-air), and that there were at least two transvestite old-timer acts. Evidently, there existed spaces for portrayals of explicitly older women, but usually only when imagined or played by men.[12]

Organisationally, this chapter is divided into four broad sections. Firstly, it sketches out the reasons why age masquerade became popular on barn dance radio and examines some influential old-timer acts who preceded the on-air phenomenon. Secondly, it unpacks exactly how performers masqueraded as old, focusing on their sound, look, and character. Subsequent sections examine how audiences engaged with age masquerade and suggest reasons for the decline of the phenomenon from the 1950s onwards, while also identifying, conversely, its historical legacies.

[12] Wade Cross cross-dressed as Aunt Jerosha alongside male counterpart 'Uncle' Josh Graves in the comedic interludes to Esco Hankins concerts: Josh Graves and Neil V. Rosenberg, *Bluegrass Bluesman: A Memoir*, ed. Fred Bartenstein (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 14-15. Frank Gates performed as Grandma in the Royal Serenaders, a group that specialised in Hawaiian music for WWVA's *Original Jamboree: The World's Original WWVA Jamboree Souvenir Album* (Wheeling, West Virginia: WWVA, 1950), 12.

Origins of Age Masquerade

'Ageing' an actor was common theatrical practice long before barn dance radio. In US musical culture, the specifically rural old character can be traced to different late nineteenth and early twentieth century entertainments: blackface minstrelsy, vaudeville, travelling tent shows, phonograph records, moving-pictures, and radio drama. Uncle Tom and Uncle Remus shows in the late nineteenth century inspired other 'aged' blackface minstrel characters. Make-up and fashion manuals in the minstrel profession advised actors and make-up artists how to 'age' actors as well as blacken them, by drawing on wrinkles, greying hair and adding make-up to achieve, what one manual termed, the 'sunken look of old age.'[13] Travelling tent shows passed these skills onto musicians who later appeared on barn dance radio. Some performers who later became 'old' had started off being 'black'. Manuel Clark and Rufus Armstrong both performed in blackface in vaudeville before creating their respective old-timer characters on barn dance radio. When Marshall Jones first decided to adopt his 'Grandpa' persona, he asked some blackface comedians to help him source a grey moustache and wrinkle makeup. More than simply a superficial influence, the rural 'plantation darkie' also shared with old-timer and other hillbilly acts in their nostalgic imaginations of rurality, the Old South, the plantation, and generic past.[14] This relates to a broader transition outlined by country music scholars: as blackface minstrels gradually fell out of fashion, the ascending white rube characterisation adopted many of their traits.[15]

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[13] Charles Townsend, *Negro Minstrelsy* (Chicago: T. S. Denison, 1891) reprinted in Annemarie Bean, James V. Hatch, and Brooks McNamara, eds., *Inside the Minstrel Mask: Readings in Nineteenth-Century Blackface Minstrelsy* (Hanover, New Hampshire: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), 127.

[14] Interview with Grandpa Jones and Ramona Riggins Jones, by Douglas B. Green, 10 March 1975, Country Music Foundation Oral History Project, CMHFA. Interview with Old Joe Clark, by John Rumble, 3 December 1985, Country Music Foundation Oral History Project, CMHFA.

[15] Pamela Fox, *Natural Acts: Gender, Race, and Rusticity in Country Music* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), 17-62. Blackface minstrelsy did, for a while, thrive in the new media of radio, cinema and television, with Amos and Andy and Al Jolson being prime examples, but it never returned to its turn-of-the-century popularity: Tim Brooks, *The Blackface Minstrel Show in Mass Media: 20th Century Performances on Radio, Records, Film and Television* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland Inc. and Company, 2019).

During this process some white performers also incorporated the agedness of some blackface minstrels into their hillbilly characters.[16] If age masquerade was a form of 'hillbilly mimicry', it was one that, through the temporal mask of age, uniquely personified the anxieties and hopes audiences felt about the disappearing past and accelerating present.[17]

Two turn-of-the-century 'rube' acts well reflect this peculiar amalgamation. Virginia-born Cal Stewart performed as Uncle Josh, an old New Englander from the imaginary town of Punkin, at vaudeville and tent shows and made phonograph recordings.[18] Charles Ross Taggart, born in Washington, D.C., performed over a variety of media as the Old Country Fiddler from Pineville, Vermont.[19] These acts foreshadowed some of the key performance traits of barn dance radio acts. Physical debilitation associated with old age, particularly bad hearing, was a regular cornerstone of their comic timing. Their old-fashioned characters were contrasted to the material culture of the modern US: telephones, automobiles, bicycles, and, in a postmodern twist, the Victrola and moving-picture house. Similarly, their old-fashioned values were juxtaposed with the heated radical politics of the

[16] Anthony Harkins notes that the white rural rube was a near global figure that gradually became a fixed part of imaginations of the South, the Ozarks and Appalachia Mountains, as well nearly anywhere rural and isolated, including the backwoods of New England. However, few of Harkins examples of proto-hillbillies in popular culture were identifiably old until the advent of barn dance radio: Harkins, *Hillbilly*, 14-18.

[17] Historical and sociological assessments of the appeal of depictions of 'hillbilly' culture are extensive and diverse, though one primary message to take from such scholarship is that while some audiences and performers winced at hillbilly stereotypes, others proudly embraced it, and consciously played with and against such expectations: Harkins, *Hillbilly*; Lange, *Smile When You Call Me a Hillbilly*; Green, 'Hillbilly Music'; Pamela Grundy, '"We Always Tried to Be Good People": Respectability, Crazy Water Crystals, and Hillbilly Music on the Air, 1933-1935', *Journal of American History* 81, no. 4 (1995): 1591-1620; J. W. Williamson, *Hillbillyland: What the Movies Did to the Mountains and What the Mountains Did to the Movies* (Chapel Hill: University North Carolina Press, 1995).

[18] Stewart recorded for Edison, Victor, Columbia, and other smaller labels. The Uncle Josh character was inspired by the lead character of a 'rural play' in which he was an understudy. Stewart inspired various copycat 'Josh' characters. Edison, for example, capitalised on Stewart's success by recording several films and cylinder recordings with other actors: Randy McNutt, *Cal Stewart, Your Uncle Josh: America's King of Rural Comedy*, Second Edition (Bloomington, Indiana: iUniverse, 2011); Frank Hoffmann and Tim Gracyk, *Popular American Recording Pioneers: 1895-1925* (London: Routledge, 2012), 166-167.

[19] Taggart brought the character to Chautauqua stages, phonograph recordings and one of the earliest 'talkie' films Adam R. Boyce, *The Man from Vermont: Charles Ross Taggart, the Old Country Fiddler* (Charleston, South Carolina: History Press, 2013), 1-20.

period, such as women's suffrage and labour unionism. The animosity in their sketches between older country characters and symbols of modernity reflected a more general tension, which blackface minstrels had played with previously: the rural/urban divide. Unlike the more complex and transitory reality their audiences really lived in, these imagined rural/urban places were distinct spheres, distinguished in part by the artificial ages of the acts themselves.[20]

The comic appeal of these acts was not straightforward. Anthony Harkins argues that the hillbilly, in some ways like the countrified blackface minstrel before them, served a variety of conflicting functions for different audiences: they simultaneously criticised the city slickers for their modern ways, validated the old-fashioned wisdom of country folk, and upheld stereotypes of the backwards and ignorant country bumpkin. The mask of age potentially helped performers navigate the delicate balance between hitting the funny bone and not hitting too close to home. For example, both Uncle Josh and Old Country Fiddler made skits that entailed their characters interacting with New York City. The audience is invited to laugh *with* the old characters at the absurdity of modern urban living, yet also laugh *at* their ignorance and naïveté. Both urbanites and ruralites alike could write off either their cutting satire on modern life or self-derogatory material on backwards farm life as the 'innocent' product of cranky old codgers. Old age diluted the inherently distasteful vulgarities of the antimodernist characterisations.[21] While both characters were New

[20] In 'Old Country Fiddler at the Telephone' (Victor B-18003/1, 1916), Taggart's character attempts to connect through the operator to several distant friends and relatives, with several humorous 'crossed wire' moments due to his poor hearing. In 'Old Country Fiddler on Woman Suffrage' (Victor 18036A, 1915) Taggart's character belittles the organisation of the women of the fictional town of Pineville to gain the vote. Similarly, in 'Uncle Josh and the Honey Bees' (Victor 3601, 1919), Stewart's character jokingly bemoans that he had bought a king bee but received only a queen bee as they were 'suffragette bees.' In 'Uncle Josh and the Labor Union' (Columbia 3601, 1919), Josh laughs about a union delegate who arrives to Punkin Center to tell Josh 'everything is union now'. In Taggart's 'Old Country Fiddler on Astronomy' (Victor 18148B, 1916), he portrays the character's village as made up of primitive folk unable to comprehend the solar system.

[21] For example, in Cal Stewart's 'Uncle Josh Weathersby's Arrival in New York City' (Victor 669, 1902), there are moments when Uncle Josh appears to be the target of the humour, and other parts where New Yorkers are the butts of the joke. A similar mask of old

Englanders, they nevertheless influenced later southern old-timer acts.[22] It is possible that the legacies between these New England old-timer acts and subsequent southern and midwestern incarnations reflect what Harkins and others argue as the broader, if partial shift of the perceived rural heartland of the US imaginary from New England to the South and Midwest in the first half of the twentieth century.[23]

Other radio programmes employed old-timer acts around the same time as barn dance shows, most notably in the burgeoning situation comedy and soap opera formats. Popular elderly rural radio characters such as Seth Parker, Lum and Abner, and Ma Perkins were important influences on musical old-timer acts. Marshal Jones, for examples toured with Lum and Abner before he first crafted his own Grandpa persona.[24] Several radio bedtime storytellers, such as Uncle Bill, Aunt Fanny, and Uncle Jed, entertained children over the airwaves using 'old' voices.[25] Considering elderly storytellers are common within

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age is used in Western cinema, with grizzled old sidekicks such as those portrayed by the typecast actor George 'Gabby' Hayes.

[22] Taggart toured the South while contracted to a Mississippian entertainment bureau. The name and character of Uncle Josh was lifted by barn dance acts such as Earl Bolick, Pat Buttram, and Josh Graves in the 1930s. Ironically, it was Stewart's death in 1919, and the subsequent flurry of career obituaries that led to a renaissance for Uncle Josh records, which historian Karl Hagstrom Miller argues may have contributed to the decision of record executives to experiment with the burgeoning 'old-time' music genre in the 1920s: Graves and Rosenberg, *Bluegrass Bluesman,* 15; George C. Biggar, 'Alabama Technique', *Prairie Farmer's New WLS Weekly*, 16 February 1935, 5; Karl Hagstrom Miller, *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 154.

[23] As Harkins shows, this shift was gradual, uneven, and incomplete, but nevertheless a recognisable transition in popular culture: Harkins, *Hillbilly*, 14-21.

[24] Radio stars Lum and Abner also started their entertainment career in blackface in vaudeville, a period when, according to the pair, 'everyone was in blackface': Harold Hapern, 'Lum and Abner: Promoters of Better Understanding Between Rural and City Folk', *Rural Radio,* June 1938, 2; N. L. Royster, *WMMN Family Album* (Fairmont, West Virginia: WWMN, 1941), 14.

[25] Both Aunt Jymmie and Uncle Bill Adam introduced what became the hugely popular *Let's Pretend* show for CBS. Aunt Fanny provided children's entertainment on the *Don McNeil Breakfast Club* as well as other network radio shows. Uncle Jed entertained children with comedy instruments, while Aunt Martha and Junior Haworth featured over Goodwill Family show on KWTO in Springfield, Missouri: *Song and Picture Barn Dance Magazine,* 1 August 1947; *Song and Picture Barn Dance Magazine*, 3 October 1947; *Song and Picture Barn Dance Magazine,* 6 February 1948.

most vernacular or oral cultures, the representation of this tradition over radio makes sense.[26] The icon of the aged storyteller in US culture also had a distinctly racialised aspect due to the legacies of blackface minstrelsy. Some radio storytellers were white actors wearing age makeup and blackface, such as the self-described 'old darky' character Spareribs over Chicago's WLS or Uncle Natchel over Nashville's WSM and Atlanta's WSB, who like Uncle Remus told stories about the natural world and the Old South.[27] There was considerable crossover between musical old-timer acts and mediatised storytellers. Dan Hornsby, for example, recorded numerous old-time sides for Columbia in the late 1920s, and then re-emerged as Uncle Ned to record children's bedtime stories for Bluebird in the early 1930s. In 1941, Mark D. Schaefer, during a low ebb in his musical career as old-timer act Ezra Buzzington, tried to convince radio producer John Lair to hire him as a storyteller on the basis that his storytelling was popular and might attract a new sponsor.[28]

Blackface minstrels, rube characterisations, and radio actors were prevalent and popular performers of old age who laid the groundwork for more music-centric old-timer acts on barn dance shows, not least by creating an audience and certain expectations for such characters. Many old-timer acts, however, claimed inspiration from real old people from their families and rural communities. Lonnie 'Pap' Wilson imitated his uncle, whom he described as 'truly a character' with a 'sparkling wit'. Wilson's small Smoky Mountains community were confused by his uncle, but nevertheless held a deep affection for him.[29] The character of 'Old Joe' arose partly out of Manuel Clark's admiration for his aged aunt and

[26] Michael Jackson, *The Politics of Storytelling: Variations on a Theme by Hannah Arendt*, Second Edition (Copenhagen, Denmark: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2013), 213; Daniel Smith et al., 'Cooperation and the Evolution of Hunter-Gatherer Storytelling', *Nature Communications* 8, no. 1 (5 December 2017): 1-9.
[27] Chad Berry, *The Hayloft Gang: The Story of the National Barn Dance* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 143. Uncle Natchel (as in 'natural') was a radio act that performed on behalf of the Natural Chilean Nitrate brand: 'Tune In - "Uncle Natchel and Sonny"', *Fort Payne Journal* [Fort Payne, AL], 17 November 1937, 8.
[28] Letter from Ezra Buzzington to John Lair, 25 November 1941, Folder 5, Box 19, Series 3, John Lair Papers, BCSCA
[29] Elizabeth Roe Schlappi, *Roy Acuff, the Smoky Mountain Boy* (New Orleans: Pelican Publishing, 1993), 83-84.

grandparents in his hometown.[30] Patrick Barrett was brought up by his grandparents, a fact that promotional campaigns argued 'accounts for his love and understanding of old folks'. In addition, as a young man Barrett listened to old men who 'recounted tales of past adventure' at the post office in Holden, Missouri. When Barrett later became a stage actor, he was typecast as an old man and found he was 'not acting a new character each time, but was creating a composite old man [what would become Uncle Ezra on radio], mixed from the friends in Holden and the stage, together with the old man I would like to be when it came my turn'.[31]

Radio listeners and fellow musicians were also sources of inspiration. Campbell's explanation of his Grandpappy character suggests a certain old-timer 'sound' existed before the act: 'Whenever I did say anything it came out crazy over the radio. Sounded like an old man talking. The other entertainers started calling me "grandpappy".' [32] In one explanation for his Grandpa character, Marshal Jones claimed some listeners to his performances on Maine radio wrote to a station to ask who the old man was, assuming that he was old from his strained vocals.[33] In another account, Jones recalled that fellow musician Bradley Kincaid named him Grandpa because he behaved like one while they were on tour in Boston.[34] Either way, Jones' stories suggest that some southerners drew their ideas about old

[30] Interview with Old Joe Clark, by John Rumble, 3 December 1985, Country Music Foundation Oral History Project, CMHFA.
[31] Postcard, 'Best Regards to Everybody - Uncle Ezra', Alka-Seltzer, 1938, Chicago, Illinois, BIO-CD-00290, Photographs Collection, CPM; Edythe Dixon, 'They Said He Couldn't Farm! WLS's Uncle Ezra of National Barn Dance', *Rural Radio*, May 1938, 5-6. Radio and film star Phillips H. Lord, who played the old character of Seth Parker, was also inspired by his real life interactions with the elderly. As he recalled to the *Rural Radio*, 'it was a natural thing for me to love to hear all the stories Grandfather could tell me about Maine and its people': Phillips H. Lord, 'Seth Parker's Birth and Rebirth', *Rural Radio*, October 1938, 3.
[32] Undated newspaper clipping, Vic Weals, 'Home Folks', Archie Campbell scrapbook, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection, Tennessee Archive of Moving Image and Sound (hereafter TAMIS), Knox County Public Library, Knoxville, Tennessee.
[33] This story comes from an undated clipping in Microfiche, 'Grandpa Jones clippings', CMHFA.
[34] Jones noted that he could relate to the Maine audiences because they, like him, were 'farm people' and 'ordinary people': Interview with Grandpa Jones, by Loyal Jones, 'Museum of Appalachia', 12 October 1996, Item 32, Box 15, Series 4, Loyal Jones Rural/Country Comedy Reference Collection, Berea College Special Collections and Archives.

age from their travels and interactions outside of the South. As with fiddlers' contests, an interregional process helped nurtured age masquerade in southern roots music.

Radio producers were an equally important influence on age masquerade. Old Joe Clark and Archie Campbell both acknowledged that it was Knoxville's WNOX producer Lowell Blanchard who suggested they act old. Blanchard's prompts may have arisen because the popular Roy Acuff and his Smoky Mountain Boys, including old-timer character Lonnie 'Pap' Wilson, had not long before left WNOX for local rival WROL.[35] Blanchard was merely filling the gap left by Wilson with Clark, and later hired Campbell to replace Clark. Other producers were also keen on the Old Joe character. When Clark moved to *Renfro Valley*, the show's producer, John Lair, persuaded him to continue in the role, even though Clark himself really 'didn't care' for the character. Lair was also responsible for Margaret Lille's Aunt Idy character.[36] *Grand Ole Opry* announcer and producer George D. Hay, meanwhile, regularly commented on the age of 'Pap' Wilson. In a 1942 broadcast Hay can be heard telling Wilson 'you old rascal you!' It is not inconceivable that Hay played a role in encouraging Wilson's 'Pap' in the first place, considering his astute awareness of the popularity of age and his control over *Opry* acts.[37] Sometimes, musicians performed several aged characters at once at the behest of radio producers: at one stage, Clark simultaneously played Uncle Bud Parker over Cincinnati's WCKY and his better known Old Joe Clark on *Renfro Valley*.[38] Together, this cumulative evidence corroborates recent research into the

[35] Jones, *Country Music Humorists and Comedians*, 77.
[36] Some caution must be taken in assuming that Lair was the sole fabricator of the Idy character. Considering Lair was an astute and occasionally arrogant businessman, and that female artistic agency has regularly been written out of music history, it is conceivable that Lair spun the story that he had come with the Idy character. For more on Lair's business practices, see Michael Ann Williams, *Staging Tradition: John Lair and Sarah Gertrude Knott* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 76-78.
[37] Radio transcription recording, 'Grand Ole Opry - Prince Albert - Part 1', WSM, Nashville, Tennessee, 17 April 1942, CMHFA.
[38] Sometimes sheer imagination inspired old-timer characters. Uncle Henry Warren, frontman of the Original Kentucky Mountaineers, occasionally portrayed an inexplicably aged and hillbilly incarnation of Abraham Lincoln: Interview with Archie Campbell, by John Rumble, 1 February 1968, Country Music Foundation Oral History Project, CMHFA; Interview with Grandpa Jones and Ramona Riggins Jones, by Douglas B. Green, 10 March

influential, if complex and diverse, role of managerial figures on the production and promotion of early 'roots' music.[39] The primarily business-minded figures such as Blanchard, Lair and Hay must have seen age masquerade as an integral ingredient of the barn dance show formula.

Manuel Clark attributes the origins of age masquerade to the machinations of producers and performing around changing issues of class, regional identity and race in the 1930s. Clark had begun performing as a 'speckleface rube' with 'blacked-out teeth' called Elmer the Great, but Blanchard suggested he drop the straight rube in favour of an old-timer, telling him 'you've got a greater act than that … Please play an old man character act for me.' Clark heeded Blanchard's advice and swapped his ginger curls for a 'grey crepe wig'. The decision proved a success: Clark recalled he subsequently 'tore [the audience] all to pieces', causing Blanchard to semi-jokingly warn him: 'I'll fire you if you don't keep that up.' It was not only the hillbilly characterisation that was becoming inappropriate, as Clark explained:

> We couldn't make fun of the colored people, we couldn't make fun of the Jews. We couldn't pull no more jokes on the Irish … someone from state of Tennessee told [us] to stop doing blackface … I believe it came out of the colleges. They come around and ask us. And we quit … But then, 'Old Joe Clark' was born.[40]

Though Clark's recollections are unclear, and nor can they be extrapolated to other acts, it does provide one reasonable explanation for age masquerade. Radio producers had to negotiate audience demands and societal changes, so asked their performers to mask the

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1975, Country Music Foundation Oral History Project, CMHFA. Interview with Old Joe Clark by John Rumble, 3 December 1985, Country Music Foundation Oral History Project, CMHFA; Charles Wolfe, *Kentucky Country: Folk and Country Music of Kentucky* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2015), 86.

[39] For studies that take into account the role of A&R personnel and radio producers in early roots music, see: Brian Ward and Patrick Huber, *A&R Pioneers: Architects of American Roots Music on Record* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2018); Kristine M. McCusker, *Lonesome Cowgirls and Honky Tonk Angels: The Women of Barn Dance Radio* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008); Diane Pecknold, *The Selling Sound: The Rise of the Country Music Industry* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

[40] Interview with Old Joe Clark, by John Rumble, 3 December 1985, Country Music Foundation Oral History Project, CMHFA.

previously popular, but increasingly uncouth ethnic characterisations in the elderly get-up. Old Joe, after all, was no less a country bumpkin than Elmer the Great, or any less buffoonish than black, Irish and Jewish caricatures in early twentieth century showbusiness. Blanchard recognised that the station could 'get away' with the same old-fashioned derogatory humour as long as Old Joe's main characteristic was his age, not his ethnicity, religion or class.

While managers and societal changes played their role, performers themselves exerted some agency in crafting and sustaining acts. Savvy bandleaders, for example, straddled the lines between management and performer and influenced the practice of age masquerade. Ballard Taylor, who played Grandpappy Nerit on *Supper Time Frolics* over Chicago's WJJD, kept up his old-timer act into the early 1950s at the request of bluegrass bandleader Bill Monroe, who, Taylor recalled, 'always wanted me to do the old man act with him.'[41] When 'Pap' Wilson could not attend a Smoky Mountain Boys gig, his bandleader, Roy Acuff, would instruct his bass player to wear the Pap outfit.[42] Likewise, when Marian and Jim Gordan transferred their successful *Smackout* show format to the *Fibber McGhee and Molly* show over network radio, they employed Bill Thompson to take over the role of 'Old-Timer', a character based around the Jim Gordan's Uncle Luke Gray from *Smackout*.[43] The recasting of old-timers, by producers and bandleaders alike, reemphasises how integral age masquerade was to barn dance programming.

As with most aspects of commercial music, however, it is difficult to separate entirely the influence of industry gatekeepers from the decisions of performers. For example,

[41] In a signed letter and photograph from the period, Taylor gives a summary of his career in which he describes how the radio setting was where he created the character of Grandpappy Nerit: Photograph and signed letter, 'Grandpappy Nerit & His Kinfolks', WLAQ, Rome, Georgia, c. 1940s, available at www.worthpoint.com/worthopedia/grandpappy-nerit-kinfolks-wlaq-rome-474586863, accessed 5 February 2018.
[42] 'Acuff Battery Captures Alaskan Fort', *Pickin' and Singin' News*, 15 January 1955, 7; Schlappi, *Roy Acuff, the Smoky Mountain Boy*, 84.
[43] John Dunning, *On the Air: The Encyclopedia of Old-Time Radio*, Second Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 251.

Archie Campbell recalled that it was while working at WNOX as a guitarist that Lowell Blanchard was on the lookout for a new comedian, so he took his own initiative to come to the show the next day dressed up like

> an old country man, with a white beard and spectacles and suspenders. I didn't have any script prepared or any jokes to tell. I just talked with Lowell and told him all about my troubles and rheumatism and so forth … That's how old 'Grandpappy' was born.[44]

Though Campbell suggested that his Grandpappy character was his own creation, he invented him to appease Blanchard's desire for a comedian. Considering elsewhere Campbell gave Blanchard credit for creating Grandpappy, it is conceivable that Blanchard had explicitly expressed his desire for an old-timer comedian. Blanchard was the prime instigator of some of Grandpappy's biggest stunts, such as a homecoming parade for Grandpappy in Knoxville in honour of Campbell's return from military service. Despite protestations from Campbell that he was 'not a hero', having travelled no further than Bermuda during his service, Blanchard insisted on the stunt, telling Campbell that 'Grandpappy's back from the war, and we want everybody to know it'. Evidently, Blanchard, and the pay packet he represented, was a considerable influence on Campbell's decision-making. Campbell later told of his joy at finding out that his Grandpappy character had raised his wage to an impressive thirty-five dollars a week.[45]

Money was important in other ways. Old-timer acts were intrinsically tied to the barn dance radio's essential function: advertising. Age masquerade became popular just as radio advertising expanded exponentially thanks to increasing technological improvements and continuing regulatory freedom. The 1920s was a period of exponential growth in radio, creating a pressing demand for content, both new and familiar. This curious combination of experimentation and cultural revivalism led to the remediation of older theatrical traditions, not least blackface minstrelsy, variety, vaudeville, and other formats featuring age

[44] Archie Campbell and Ben Byrd, *Archie Campbell: An Autobiography* (Memphis, Tennessee: Memphis State University Press, 1981), 53.
[45] Campbell and Byrd, 60.

masquerade. The Depression, however, created severe pressures for radio stations: share prices in the Radio Corporation of America, for example, fell from $572 in 1929 to $10 in 1931. Smaller stations also struggled to break even. However, radio also benefited from the greater losses felt by the phonograph industry, with record sales dropping from $46 million to $16.9 million between 1930 and 1931.[46] These pressures intensified the presence of sponsors and emboldened them and stations to get their message across at any cost.[47] After it was realised how popular age masquerade was, many Depression-hit stations simply replicated a winning formula. Clark acknowledged that the popularity of Monk and Sam, the latter of whom portrayed old-timer character Silias Tewksberry, was an influence on 'Old Joe'. Campbell spent time in Roy Acuff's band and likely saw first-hand the popularity of 'Pap' Wilson. However, direct imitations of other old-timer acts did not always please audiences or producers. Blanchard once told Clark: 'Now I know that you're not trying to be like Archie Campbell. You can't be like Archie. Archie is Archie and you're you.'[48] Audiences craved both the familiarity of an old-timer act, and a uniquely personalised aesthetic or style which made them stand out.

Age masquerade flourished at a time when radio executives were selling airtime to sponsors on the promise of reaching a large, untapped, and lucrative white rural consumer market in the South and Midwest. Concerns were widespread during the late 1920s and 1930s that flight from the country to the city would lead to crop shortages and a lag of 'modern values' in the country. To remedy the problem, government and business united to bring the city to the country, offering farmers a middle-class, consumerist lifestyle,

[46] Radio benefited from the phonograph industry's losses because it provided essentially 'free' entertainment once the set was bought, unlike the phonograph player: Andre Millard, *America on Record: A History of Recorded Sound*, Second Edition (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 165; Erik Barnouw, *The Golden Web: A History of Broadcasting in the United States, 1933 to 1953* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 36; Robert Sobel, *RCA* (New York: Stein & Day, 1984), 99.
[47] Christopher H. Sterling and John Michael Kittross, *Stay Tuned: A History of American Broadcasting*, Third Edition (London: Routledge, 2002), 124-130.
[48] Interview with Old Joe Clark, by John Rumble, 3 December 1985, Country Music Foundation Oral History Project, CMHFA.

jettisoned of the negatives of urban living that might interfere with their traditional 'rural' values.[49] This tricky sell was at the heart of barn dance radio, and age masquerade suited the economic project; audiences instinctively trusted the grandparental figures and shiny parade of nostalgic, premodern imagery that ultimately were used to sell modern products and industrially-produced staple goods. Bowers Department Store in Knoxville, Tennessee, for example, regularly advertised over local radio stations WROL and WNOX, and regularly featured Campbell's Grandpappy in their advertising campaigns. In one script, Grandpappy runs the Antique Corner of Bowers, giving listeners a tour of the store leading up to Christmas.[50] Local businesses such as Bowers and the relatively new 'supermarkets' in Knoxville also encouraged barn dance shows to use their sites, even their car parks, as venues for live shows.[51] The familiar faces of old-timer acts also softened the images of highly processed, internationally-sourced household goods of the modern age, such as JFG coffee or Carnation milk.[52] Old-timer acts on barn dance radio were just one example of a wider co-option of the image of southern elders in twentieth century marketing culture, such as Aunt Jemima, Aunt Fanny, Colonel Sanders, Uncle Ben, Uncle Natchel, and Jack Daniels. In roots music as well, both fictional and real 'elderly' brand patrons, albeit each with their own complex gender and racial contexts, helped sell modern produce with their friendly smiles, wrinkled faces and old-fashioned values.

Some old-timer acts marketed products that were geared towards older audiences and old-fashioned tastes. Uncle Ezra, a star of the *National Barn Dance*, was regularly

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[49]This process began in the late 1920s but became more pronounced as the nation recovered from the economic depression in the mid-to-late 1930s: Steve Craig, '"The More They Listen, the More They Buy" Radio and the Modernizing of Rural America, 1930-1939', *Agricultural History* 80, no. 1 (2006): 1-16; Randall Patnode, '"What These People Need Is Radio": New Technology, the Press, and Otherness in 1920s America', *Technology and Culture* 44, no. 2 (2003): 285-305.

[50] WROL radio script, 6 December 1950, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection, TAMIS.

[51] WNOX promoted a series of concerts in car parks outside new supermarkets, which Grandpappy played a vital role: Series of undated photographs, Archie Campbell scrapbook, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection, TAMIS.

[52] Campbell's Grandpappy was mascot at various times for Carnation Milk and JFG coffee: Undated publicity photograph, JFG Coffee, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection, TAMIS; Undated concert photograph, Archie Campbell, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection.

associated next to the show's long-term sponsor, Alka Seltzer, an effervescent tablet which relieved everyday ailments, including rheumatism. Campbell's Grandpappy was a mascot for Garrett's Snuff in the late 1930s, a product relatively out of fashion amongst cigarette-smoking American youth but more likely appealing to older generations.[53] Other old-timer acts promoted cigarettes: the owners of Camel cigarettes sponsored a NBC show featuring Uncle Ezra in the early 1940s.[54] Just as Prince Albert potentially recognised that the elderly Uncle Dave Macon, by virtue of his 'healthy old age', was a useful patron over the brand's sponsored shows over WSM, so did Camel's owners see often energetic old-timer acts as useful for their marketing.

Arguably, the fake elderly character of Ezra was a more useful face for a tobacco brand than an actually aged performer. Uncle Am Stuart, for example, a genuinely elderly fiddler who played over WSM in the 1920s, was a big smoker up until he died of double pneumonia. If known as the 'old man's friend' for causing a supposedly 'peaceful' death, double pneumonia is aggravated by both weaker immune systems in advanced age and lifelong tobacco use.[55] One explanation then for age masquerade was that sponsors and radio stations implicitly deemed the bodies of real older musicians to be unreliable and therefore damaging to brand identities.

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[53] An advertisement for the product featured Grandpappy in typical attire, and was hand-signed 'Yours for Garrett's Snuff, Grandpappy'. Undated publicity photograph, Garret's Snuff, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection, TAMIS.

[54] Dozens of scripts of Ezra's NBC shows for R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company (the owner of Camel cigarettes) in the early 1940s are archived in the R. J. Reynolds Records, Truth Tobacco Industry Documents Archives, University of California, San Francisco, available at https://www.industrydocuments.ucsf.edu, accessed 12 September 2019.

[55] 'Uncle Am Stuart, Violinist, Is Dead.', *Kingsport Times* [Kingsport, Tennessee], 19 March 1926, 5. Ironically, smoking was part of Stuart's public persona as a virile, hyper-masculine southerner. One newspaper described how Stuart 'smokes cigarettes, drinks corn likker and likes the girls.' Photographs show Stuart smoking cigars: 'Untaught Fiddler Is Best In Three States', *Chronicle* [Shippensburg, Pennsylvania], 21 August 1924. 5. The popular perception of pneumonia as the 'old man's friend' was discussed by William Osler, *The Principles and Practice of Medicine* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1901). Of course, pneumonia afflicted Americans of all ages. Stuart's labelmate, George Reneau, for example, died from pneumonia aged 32 while working on the streets of Knoxville, Tennessee: Wolfe, *Tennessee Strings*, 32.

A similar approach was likely taken by the Royal Consolidated Chemical Corporation, producers of New Peruna Tonic, a 'cure' for a litany of ills and revitaliser of body and mind. The Federal Trade Commission took Royal Consolidated to court in 1934 for a violation of antitrust laws by 'exaggerated and misleading' advertising. The judge ruled that the company cease and desist disseminating any more advertisements which claimed that Peruna could cure the common cold or assist in 'building up strength, energy, or vigor'. In this context, the move to connect their product to old-timer 'patrons' Grandpa Jones and Uncle Enoch was a cunning manoeuvre around their legal obligations. A Peruna-sponsored songbook from the early 1940s features an image of Uncle Enoch clapping furiously to the music. Imagery of the highly energetic elderly figures suggested that the tonic revitalised old men. Such marketing strategy would not have been unusual for the company, which also sold Kolor Bak, a dye to hide grey hair.[56]

Further indication of how sponsors valued old-timer acts as a part of their wider marketing campaigns comes from the way radio stations used positive reviews of previous sponsors to attain new ones. In a brochure advertising WNOX to new sponsors, the station noted that the return of Campbell's Grandpappy to the station was welcomed by 'the largest crowd in WNOX history' proving that 'There is little wonder that sponsors of the *Mid-Day Merry-Go-Round* unanimously report such splendid results … Mention the name "[Blanchard] Lowell and Grandpappy" to radio listeners around Knoxville, and faces immediately become lit up with pleased smiles.' The Kerr Motor Company, who sponsored the station, offered their own reference: 'We are very happy to join with others in welcoming "Grandpappy" back to the noon day show. It gives us pleasure to able to

[56] Royal Consolidated went to the Court of Appeals in 1951 and failed to secure a reversal of the verdict. Peruna itself had been under scrutiny from the medical community since 1906, when it was owned by the Dr. Miles Medical Company: *Consolidated Royal Chemical Corp. v. Federal Trade Commission*, 1951, US Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit, 191 F.2d 896. For Peruna advertisements featuring old-timer acts, see *Peruna's Barn Dance Favorites* (Chicago: Folk Songs Inc., c. 1938); Photograph, 'Peruna ad with various musicians', c. late 1930s, BIO-PR-00072, Photographs Collection, Center for Popular Music. For more on Peruna's legal history, see Harry First, 'Trade Secrets and Antitrust Laws', *New York University Law and Economics Working Papers*, Paper 255 (2011): 15.

honestly say that we consider the *Mid-Day Merry Go Round* one of the best advertising mediums available.'[57] Station bosses were equally pleased with Grandpappy's selling power. Campbell recalled that when a junior executive at WROL attempted to fire him, the station owner intervened: 'If you're thinking about trying to get rid of Grandpappy, forget it. He stays.'[58] Notably, none of these sponsor references mentioned any genuinely aged act as having the same influence. Although just one example, Grandpappy's popularity with his sponsors is indicative of the kind of influence age masquerade could have in the industry. Grandpappy even joked on-air about the pervasive commercialism behind barn dance radio. An undated script for his *Morning Ticket* show features Grandpappy discussing the week's sponsor but then interrupting himself to joke about the coercion of artists by sponsors. As well as being appealing to sponsors and audiences, the guise of the loudmouthed but innocent grandfather enabled Campbell to wryly joke to listeners about the excesses of commercial radio.[59]

The Old-Timer Sound

Old-timer acts employed a range of sounds to indicate aurally their 'old age' to radio listeners. Age masquerade affected the choice of repertoire, singing style, and band

[57] This was widespread practice for radio stations and barn dance shows. *Midday Merry Go-Round* also published a brochure that listed the Dixie Dew Syrup Company, the Indian River Medicine Company and the Tennessee School of Beauty as pleased sponsors who 'all report high turnover directly attributable to *Merry Go Round.' Midday Merry Go-Round* (Knoxville: WNOX, c. 1940s), 2, 5; Undated brochure, *Midday Merry-Go Round*, (Knoxville, Tennessee: WNOX), 6 in Box 1, Campbell Family Collection, TAMIS.
[58] Some caution should be taken in reading this anecdote as entirely true. Campbell may have recalled his own importance at the station in different terms to his colleagues: Campbell and Byrd, *Archie Campbell: An Autobiography*, 98.
[59] In another instance of meta-radio performance, Grandpappy complains in one 1950s skit that a radio executive he calls 'Twittle Bottom' is censoring his material. Subsequently, while singing 'Old Man River', Campbell is told by the executive that 'The word "old", I'm afraid, might be offensive to some our elderly listeners, so I suggest you change that to elderly': Undated *Morning Ticket* script, c. 1940s-1950s, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection, TAMIS; undated radio script, c. 1940s-1950s, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection, TAMIS.

personnel. Old-timer acts, unsurprisingly, were conduits for older songs. Just as A&R teams sought original hits (whose songs they could copyright), so too did they turn to performers who had collected old, familiar and 'traditional' songs (which they often claimed copyright over). Marshal Jones, ironically, was known as the 'Young Singer of Old Songs' before becoming Grandpa.[60] Age masquerade was a natural development in the old-time genre: if an act performed 'old' songs, logically they may as well be 'old'. John Lair named Old Joe Clark after an old song of that name.[61] In a Grandpa Jones songbook, the music was pitched as 'old and well-loved folksongs of the hill people. Songs that had been handed down by word-of-mouth, in most cases and have never been put on paper until now … real, authentic, beautiful and old songs'.[62] Similarly, a brochure for WNOX's *Midday Merry-Go-Round* from the late 1940s played up the show's 'real, old-fashioned, genuine, simon-pure mountain music' and '[Archie Campbell's] Grandpappy and his little band, bringing words and melody right from the Tennessee hills'.[63] This romantic language concerning the antique 'purity' of the music of old-timer acts, ironic considering they were entirely 'inauthentic', was uncannily similar to that used to describe the real old performers. Seemingly, some listeners saw no incongruity in a pretend old person playing old music.

[60] Interview with Grandpa Jones and Ramona Riggins Jones, by Douglas B. Green, 10 March 1975, Country Music Foundation Oral History Project, CMHFA.
[61] Even cursory listens to transcription recordings of *Renfro Valley Barn Dance, Grand Ole Opry* and the *National Barn Dance* indicate old-timer acts, like many other young acts, performed numerous vernacular or 'folk' songs dating back to the nineteenth century or earlier. For example, Aunt Idy performed 'Barbara Allen' during a *Renfro Valley Barn Dance* broadcast in 1941, a song celebrated by folklorists and collectors for its historical roots in the British Isles. The irony that clearly fake 'old' character were upholding authentic 'folk' traditions was a common theme. Archie Campbell's Grandpappy, for example, once acted as emcee of the Old Fiddlers' Contest at the Great Smoky Mountains Wildflower Festival, an annual event showcasing the region's finest fiddling talent: Radio transcription recording, 'Renfro Valley Barn Dance', WLW, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1 March 1941, Folder 5, Box 80, Series 9, John Lair Papers, BCSCA; Undated newspaper clipping, c. 1940s-1950s, Archie Campbell scrapbook, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection, TAMIS; Interview with Old Joe Clark, by John Rumble, 3 December 1985, Country Music Foundation Oral History Project, CMHFA
[62] Grandpa Jones, *Grandpa Jones: The Kentuck' Yodeler* (Chicago: M.M. Cole Publishing Co., 1937), 2.
[63] *WNOX Knoxville Presents the Mid-Day Merry-Go-Round* (Knoxville: WNOX, c. 1940s), 3.

Unlike aged artists, who generally speaking, sang old songs but rarely sang those about old age, the most common material in age masquerade repertoire was age-themed material. Grandpa Jones songbooks featured song such as 'Silver Threads Among the Gold', 'Since Pappy Lost His Corn Cob Pipe', 'The Old Man in the Moon' and 'You're Never Too Old For Love'.[64] A&R personnel or radio producers usually were behind these choices of repertoire. A representative from Peer Music International, for example, specifically requested Old Joe Clark record 'Old Age Will Kill You' (Ark 8570) in 1962, credibly reflecting older industry practices [65] Old-timer acts, unlike real aged musicians, were comfortable singing songs about old age, including more ageist material. The announcer Lowell Blanchard arranged for a version of 'The Old Gray Mare' to be played when Campbell's Grandpappy came onstage, with the lyrics changed to 'The old grey man he ain't what he used to be … singing on the radio!'[66] Predictably, old-timer acts were associated with songs that described older, even ancient eras. During a 1941 *Opry* broadcast, announcer George D. Hay introduced Lonnie 'Pap' Wilson as old enough to be on the titular boat from the song that he was about to perform, 'Uncle Noah's Ark'.[67]

Many old-timer acts also sang with 'old' voices. In a 1948 *Renfro Valley Barn Dance* broadcast, Aunt Idy can be heard purposefully 'straining' to hit a high note and warbling with uncontrollable vibrato. John Lair then tells listeners sardonically 'Idy really

[64] Jones, *Grandpa Jones: The Kentuck' Yodeler*; Grandpa Jones, *Star of Grand Ole Opry - Harmonies of the Hill Country* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Louis Music Publishing Co., 1947); Grandpa Jones, *Star of Grand Ole Opry - Hill and Country Songs* (New York: Tannen Music Inc., 1954). Other instances of old-timer acts playing songs about old age include Campbell's Grandpappy singing 'When My Hair is Gray' and 'Will You Still Love Me When I'm Old', 'I Love Her More (Now That She's Old)' and 'Rocking Alone In An Old Rocking Chair': Undated song lyrics, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection, TAMIS; Undated songbook, *Archie 'Grandpappy' Campbell and the Old Timers*, WNOX, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection.
[65] Interview with Old Joe Clark, by John Rumble, 3 December 1985, Country Music Foundation Oral History Project, CMHFA.
[66] Campbell and Byrd, *Archie Campbell: An Autobiography*, 53.
[67] Radio transcription recording, 'Grand Ole Opry - Prince Albert - Part 2', 20 December 1941, WSM, Nashville, Tennessee, CMHFA.

went for that high note'.[68] Recordings of Grandpa Jones and Old Joe Clark indicate they also sang with an excessively stretched, grainy voice. Revealingly, old-timer acts did not 'age' instrumental performance in the same way. Given age has real effects on the speed and dexterity on banjo-playing hands - despite notable exceptions like Uncle Dave Macon - Jones and Clark were virtuosos who reproduced no obvious signs of decline. To the contrary, the pair performed with a ferocity that belied their 'age'. Performers and producers probably felt audiences would prefer fast, well-played banjo playing than more realistic depictions of elderly performers. Furthermore, the surprise of seeing a grandparent figure 'tearing it up' on a banjo was humorously incongruous. Like old fiddlers' contests, underneath this humour lay an inferred distinction between old-time music, with its emotional power to revitalise even the elderly, and more 'studied' classical music, where advanced ageing was considered almost exclusively in terms of musical decline.

If their playing did not reflect their 'age', performers typically played antiquated instruments. Jones adopted the banjo around the time he became Grandpa, a period in which most young country musicians were trading their banjos for the more fashionable guitar. Jones recalled that it was not until the birth of bluegrass in the 1940s that the banjo experienced a revival. Much like Jones' visual aesthetic, his adoption of the banjo, an instrument fixed in the US imagination in the nineteenth century, purposefully went against modern trends.[69] Lonnie 'Pap' Wilson also made a point of adopting older, or at least more traditional, instrumentation. Pap's Jug Band, a subgroup from Roy Acuff's Smoky Mountain Boys, featured household items, such as jugs, washboards and cutlery. Though numerous jug bands, white and black, were prevalent in the period, these were hardly modern instruments. Stephen Wade has shown the irony that folklorists such as John Work III were recording jug

[68] Radio transcription recording, 'Renfro Valley Barn Dance', WLW, Cincinnati, Ohio, 18 November 1939, Folder 5, Box 80, Series 9, John Lair Papers, BCSCA.
[69] Interestingly, while real-life elderly banjo player Uncle Dave Macon was an influence on Jones, it was his youthful, female peer Cousin Emmy who taught him how to play: Louis M. Jones and Charles Wolfe, Louis M. Jones and Charles Wolfe, *Everybody's Grandpa: Fifty Years Behind the Mike* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984), 20-39.

bands in Nashville in order to capture a supposedly disappearing style at the same time that Pap's Jug Band were entertaining thousands on the *Opry*.[70] Conspicuously absent in the age masquerade phenomenon were many old-timer acts that played the fiddle. One explanation for this is that audiences and producers, despite their embrace of comedic depictions of age, remained cautious of mimicking the well-loved and iconic old fiddler from the 1920s.

Many old-timer acts were part of mixed ensembles that exploited certain age dynamics. An Uncle Henry's Original Kentucky Mountaineers performance typically featured the titular old-timer character playing 'old-time' material followed by younger band members playing modern dance and jazz tunes. The band simultaneously reflected the segregation of 'modern' and 'old-time' music, and, at the same time, helped defy it by identifying as a 'Modern and Old-Time Dance Band'. Such acts, in James Leary's words, 'combined old-time elements with a playfully reckless interpretation of modern music.'[71] The group performed 'hot' pop numbers with 'unconventional instruments or parodic lyrics, perhaps combined with tricky movements or silly facial expressions and physical contortion.' As with some real elderly acts, having an old-timer act fronting such a group made sense: the band could play old and new favourites, all the while getting some laughs by having an old-timer act do some comically bad playing.[72]

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[70] Stephen Wade, *The Beautiful Music All Around Us: Field Recordings and the American Experience* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 136-137.
[71] James Leary, *Polkabilly: How the Goose Island Ramblers Redefined American Folk Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 95.
[72] Several transcription recordings of Original Kentucky Mountaineers demonstrate this musical contrast: Radio transcription recordings, 'Uncle Henry and His Original Kentucky Mountaineers', TR-30024/1343-1349, Southern Folklife Collection Transcription Discs, Southern Folklife Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Significantly, the grey-wigged Guy Wood and his Cornhuskers, a midwestern old-time act, wore overalls and faithfully performed only old-time music. In a postcard advertising a concert in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, in 1934, the group claimed the title of 'Midwest's Leading Old Time Novelty Band', and the promoters made clear in the subscript that 'modern dance bands' were also available'. Postcard reprinted in James Leary, *Polkabilly: How the Goose Island Ramblers Redefined American Folk Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 28.

Age masquerade also imparted different meanings to a familiar song lyric. In ‘Are You From Dixie (‘Cause I'm From Dixie Too)’, one of many songs ‘Southland’ songs written by Jack Yellen and George L. Cobb in the early twentieth century, the protagonist, a displaced southerner, bumps into another southerner while far away from Dixie. [73] Already teeming with emotional meaning for a southern diaspora that held sentimental memories of the South, the song takes on a bittersweet temporal meaning when sung by Jones in 1947 (King 2796). Jones furiously pulsates through the song in a quicker tempo and with more exaggerated vigour and emotional singing than previous versions. The excitement of the narrator is most notably felt in the final verse:

> It was away back in eighty-nine [1889],
> I crossed that old Mason Dixon line.
> Gee! But I've yearned, longed to return,
> To all the good old pals I left behind.

The choice of the year 1889 reflects the period in which the song was written; it makes sense for a young singer in the early twentieth century to sing the line. However, when Jones sings it in 1947, the implication is that he has retained a powerful sense of southern identity despite him having lived out of the South for a good sixty years, and through the interceding years of enormous social, economic, political upheaval in the region and beyond. An implicit message of much age masquerade music was that neither distance nor time could stop a southerner being southern.

Ways of vocalising - phonetics, vocalisms and dated lexicon - were another method for performing ‘agedness’ and ‘southerness’. Audibly ‘old’ cackles, whoops, and wails punctuated songs and dialogue on the surviving transcription recordings of broadcasts featuring Lonnie ‘Pap’ Wilson, Uncle Ezra, Old Joe Clark, and Aunt Idy. Campbell’s

[73] Grandpa Jones made memorable television performances of the song over the *Grand Ole Opry* and CBS’s *Hee Haw*. The song was performed by many young vaudeville and country performers, including Bill Murray (Victor B-16901, 1915) and the Blue Sky Boys (Bluebird B-8294, 1939).

Grandpappy was known in the Knoxville press for his 'famous grandpappy squeak.'[74] These laughs replicated a recognised medical phenomenon of ageing: the gradual graining of the vocal cords. The loss of muscle mass and thinning of mucous membranes in the larynx in ageing leads to the voice becoming higher pitched and attaining a tremor or shakiness. Although used for a humorous function rather than an emotional one, this imitation of the 'grain' of the elderly voice provided radio listeners an aural sense of the 'age' of old-timer acts.[75]

Old-timer acts performed with stereotyped accents, vocabularies and ways of speaking that were excessively old-fashioned, localised, and undiluted. In a radio script likely from the early 1950s, Campbell's Grandpappy uses words such as 'dang' ('damn'), and 'shore' ('sure').[76] Similarly, Clark used antiquated phrases such as 'God darn it'.[77] Whereas Grandpappy's speaking parts were tightly scripted, Old Joe's lines were more improvised, but still influenced by real elderly family relations:

> I was using the voice of my old aunt, her ways of talking, and my grandpaw's sayings and my Uncle Mitchell's. They broke up the English language in such a way that you would swear it came out of a book … I used things like 'pon my word of honor,' 'plum wore out,' 'tuckered,' and 'bodacious' … She had the funniest laugh I ever heard. She slapped her legs when she got tickled and rubbed her mouth. I do the same thing.[78]

Drawing from real-life elders, Clark reproduced older southern linguistic expressions: the *Oxford English Dictionary* speculates that the word 'bodacious' derives from the nineteenth

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[74] Undated newspaper clipping, 'Here It Is Folks: Story of Grandpappy, Popular WNOX Star', c. 1937, Archie Campbell scrapbook, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection, TAMIS.
[75] Radio transcription recording, 'Grand Ole Opry - Prince Albert - Part 2', WSM, Nashville, Tennessee, 4 October 1941, CMHFA; Radio transcription recording, Uncle Ezra, *Radio E-Z-R-A*, (Old Time Radio, n.d., reissue of 1944 recordings); 'Renfro Valley Barn Dance', WHAS, Louisville, Kentucky, 27 November 1948, in Folder 28, Box 90, Series 9, John Lair Papers, BCSCA. For the 'grain of the voice', see Roland Barthes, 'The Grain of the Voice', in *Image-Music-Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 179–89.
[76] Undated radio script, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection, TAMIS.
[77] Radio transcription recording, '*Renfro Valley Barn Dance',* WHAS, Louisville, Kentucky, 22 August 1964, Folder 7, Box 81, Series 9, John Lair Papers, BCSCA.
[78] Jennifer Hewlett, 'Country Musician, Humorist Dies', *Herald Leader* [Lexington, KY] 20 February 1998, 1.

century South.[79] Pat Barrett also took linguistic inspiration from the old men of his hometown of Holden, Missouri. Barrett claimed that 'first-hand knowledge of the way old men act and talk' played a vital role in his character's popularity.[80] An increasing interest in linguistics in the media and academy coincided with the age masquerade phenomenon. Standard interpretations of the time reckoned that the processes of modernisation, industrialisation, and migration led to dialect levelling of regional variations of American English.[81] As old-timers used 'old-fashioned' language, so too did they pretend to be confused by 'modern' language. In one script, Campbell's Grandpappy repeatedly mispronounces the word 'appendix'. Grandpappy's young colleagues tease him for being out of touch, thereby presenting a changing South where young people hold more advanced vocabularies (and standards of education) than their grandparents.[82]

The Old-Timer Look

While many listeners never saw their favourite old-timer acts from radio, most of the 1930s and 1940s barn dance shows, unlike those in the 1920s, had live audiences who responded well to visual aesthetics.[83] The consumption of radio was more of an intertextual and affective activity than previously assumed: radio stations encouraged fans to engage

[79] 'Bodacious, Adj.', in *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, available at http://www.oed.com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/view/Entry/20881, accessed 23 April 2018.
[80] Edythe Dixon, 'They Said He Couldn't Farm! WLS's Uncle Ezra of National Barn Dance', *Rural Radio*, May 1938, 5-6.
[81] This was particularly the case with 'Appalachian English': Linda L. Blanton and Joey Lee Dillard, 'Southern Appalachia: Social Considerations of Speech', in *Toward a Social History of American English* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co, 1985), 73-90.
[82] Though no recording of this skit exists, Grandpappy's rough pronunciation of the word was clearly central to the skit, considering the line is repeated numerous times in the script: Undated radio script, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection, TAMIS.
[83] Stations prided themselves on the size and cacophony of audiences. Live audiences also brought potential consumers of merchandise, provided an atmosphere of frivolity, and enabled a more natural performance from acts, particularly comedy performers whose jokes relied on a responsive laughter from the crowd. Although stations made most their money from sponsors and advertisements, they and the artists they hired earned revenue from live revues and other personal appearances: Jonathan R. Wynn, 'Country Music and Fan Culture', in *The Oxford Handbook of Country Music*, ed. Travis D. Stimeling (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 479-494; Pecknold, *The Selling Sound*, 30-48; Susan J. Douglas, *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination*, Second Edition (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 124-160.

with a material and visual culture built around advertisements, songbooks, sheet music, and merchandise. Old-timer acts sported costumes and accessories that indicated visually that their characters were 'old'. Tobacco pipes, grey wigs, stuck-on facial hair, walking sticks, and outdated fashions collectively formed what can be called an 'old-timer look', that reveals, in often crude terms, how performers interpreted old age. This 'look' was only one aspect of the broader imagery surrounding barn dance radio. Just as producers and performers carefully orchestrated the image of the hillbilly male with working-shirts and dungarees, the singing cowboy with boots and hat, the honky-tonk girl with gingham-dresses, and even the barn with mountain and farm stage sets, so too did they carefully dress old-timer acts.

These accessories and clothes were what fashion scholars call 'tie-ins' and, in this case, they created an instant impression of antiquity or specifically an imagined rural past.[84] Fake grey hair, including extravagantly long white beards giving a sage-like effect, shorter, whispery grey 'chin whiskers', and lengthy stuck-on eyebrows, was the most common indicator of age. Such accessories also suggested a certain 'unkemptness' or lack of self-care associated both with older age and 'hillbillies'.[85] Sometimes fake hair was tied to a specific past era. Grandpa Jones wore a moustache which flared off his face in a style more in-keeping with the fashions of the late nineteenth century than the thin moustaches in vogue in the 1930s.[86] Boots and smoking pipes were similarly dated. Jones wore a pair of genuine

[84] Ruth Rubinstein, *Dress Codes: Meanings And Messages In American Culture* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1995), 206.
[85] Images of Ezra Buzzington, Lonnie 'Pop' Wilson, Silias Tewksberry and Archie Campbell well illustrate these styles: 'Publicity Photograph of Buzzington's Rube Band', c. 1930s, Box 3, John Lair Papers, BCSCA; *Roy Acuff's and His Smoky Mountain Songs* (Nashville, Tennessee: Acuff-Rose Publications, 1943), 7; C.O. Hanesen and S. L. Johnson, *A Trip Thru Monk and Sam's Song Farm* (Louisville, Ky: Self-published, 1933); Undated songbook, *Archie* '*Grandpappy' Campbell and the Old Timers*, c. 1940s, WNOX, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection, TAMIS. Only one act was found who wore a bald cap: Cliff Carl's Pappy Cliff character for WHO's *Iowa Barn Dance Frolic,* who, ironically, was proprietor of the barber shop of the show's fictional town: *WHO Des Moines 1938 Picture Book* (Des Moines, Iowa: WHO, 1938), 9.
[86] Any image of Jones in this period shows his characteristic moustache, though an advert for a Grandpa Jones folio on the back of some sheet music show is a good example of how

Civil War-era boots.[87] Publicity shots of Campbell's Grandpappy and Grandpappy Nerit show them holding a corncob pipe rather than a cigarette.[88] Old-timer acts, arguably more so than genuinely aged musicians, were not just old, but literally old-fashioned.

Clothing sometimes consisted of identifiably rural attire, exemplified by the dungarees, boots, workman shirts, and straw hats worn by Grandpa Jones or the gingham dress worn by female old-timer acts Sarie and Sally on the *Opry*.[89] Although the farmer outfit did not signify age per se, the performance of agedness and rurality often intersected. Jones was, to use his catchphrase, 'everybody's Grandpa' from 'the country'.[90] The best illustration of the many potential meanings of clothing in this context are the worn, oversized and high-waisted trousers commonly worn by such acts. Baggy trousers, worn out of material necessity and a thrifty culture, demonstrated a character's rurality and working-class roots, and was part of the generic hillbilly aesthetic. Yet the trousers also subtly indicated a very real medical relation between ageing and weight loss, which old-timer acts reinforced with excessively high waistbands.[91] Old-timer costumes, however, were not always so 'countrified'. Old Joe Clark referred to Campbell's Grandpappy as 'more of a modern, like Uncle Ezra', because, like Ezra, he wore smart suit jackets. What connects

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flared and old-fashioned it must have seemed: 'Down in Nashville, Tennessee' (Cincinnati, Ohio: Lois Music Publishing Co., 1948) in Sheet Music Collections, CPM.

[87] Jones cherished the boots, having repaired the soles numerous times over his decades-long career. The boots are currently on display in the Country Music Hall of Fame Museum in Nashville, Tennessee.

[88] Archie Campbell, 'Signed Publicity Photograph', c. 1940s, Campbell Family Collection, TAMIS.

[89] *Rural Radio*, February 1938, 12.

[90] This catchphrase was redeployed for Jones' autobiography: Louis M. Jones and Charles Wolfe, *Everybody's Grandpa: Fifty Years Behind the Mike* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984).

[91] A photograph of the *Old Dominion Barn Dance* cast shows two 'hillbilly' characters wearing oversized trousers with braces, one of whom is an old-timer act: Photograph, 'Old Dominion Barn Dance cast, WRVA', c. 1940s/1950s, BIO-PR-00084, Photographs Collection, CPM; Dawn E. Alley et al., 'Changes in Weight at the End of Life: Characterizing Weight Loss by Time to Death in a Cohort Study of Older Men', *American Journal of Epidemiology* 172, no. 5 (1 September 2010): 558-565.

these occasionally diverse outfits is that they all were ineffably antifashion.[92] A WMMN 'family album' sarcastically praises Grandpa Jones' attire as 'the latest fashions.'[93] Jones' rustic outfit is intentionally nothing like the urbane fashions of the day. Even Campbell's Grandpappy and Uncle Ezra wore messily assembled and crumpled suits, suggesting that they could not properly dress themselves.

Other aspects of the old-timer look rested more on generic associations between old age and physical debilitation. Walking canes and rocking chairs signalled both notions of frailty and tranquillity in old age. When Campbell's Grandpappy broke his cane during a broadcast, he offered WNOX listeners a prize for the 'best judged' cane to replace his own.[94] Uncle Henry Warren wore reading glasses, while other artists blackened out teeth, in order to indicate respectively their presbyopia and edentulism [Appendix 3.1].[95] Taking tips from vaudeville and blackface minstrelsy, wrinkles were imitated by applying thick lines of dark makeup across the foreheads and cheeks. Publicity photographs of Campbell's Grandpappy character show how exaggerated these lines were, suggesting they enabled audiences to see their age from afar.[96]

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[92] Fred Davis, *Fashion, Culture, and Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 180-181; Rubinstein, *Dress Codes*, 191-205; Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2002), 73-89.
[93] N. L. Royster, *WMMN Family Album* (Fairmont, West Virginia: WWMN, 1941), 29.
[94] 'Folk Talent and Tunes', *Billboard*, 5 June 1948, 31.
[95] An undated newspaper clipping in John Lair's collections featuring a photograph of Uncle Henry, bandleader of the Original Kentucky Mountaineers, shows him with a walking cane and reading glasses. A Peruna-sponsored songbook features a photograph of radio star Uncle Enoch wearing thin rimmed glasses. A WNOX brochure features a photograph of Archie Campbell as Grandpappy looking disapprovingly over the rim of his glasses at announcer Lowell Blanchard. Uncle Josh Graves describes his blacked out teeth and lens-less glasses in his autobiography: 'Undated Newspaper Clipping, 'Uncle Henry', Box 3, John Lair Papers, BCSCA; *Peruna's Barn Dance Favorites* (Chicago: Folk Songs Inc., c. 1938); *WNOX Knoxville Presents the Mid-Day Merry-Go-Round* (Knoxville: WNOX, c. 1940s); Graves and Rosenberg, *Bluegrass Bluesman*, 15. For the increased awareness in this period of the effects of ageing on eyesight, see Nicholas J. Wade, *A Natural History of Vision* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2000), 50-58.
[96] *WNOX Picture Album: Archie 'Grandpappy' Campbell* (Knoxville, Tennessee: WNOX, 1947), 2.

Age scholar Veronica Vasterling describes how 'ageing is accompanied by clearly perceptible signs … of bodily change', and highlights grey hair and wrinkles as 'daily reality check[s]' of an individual's own ageing, as well as that of others.[97] These accessories essentialised the reduced ability and impairment (walking stick and reading glasses), and decline of youthful looks (grey hair, toothless grins, and wrinkles) culturally associated with old age. Such outfits held potent meaning in the context of ascendant anti-ageing medicine, dermatology, hair dyes, and cosmetic surgery practices, but the aged aesthetic did more than simply indicate old age, it also facilitated the comedy. In a *Renfro Valley* broadcast featuring Old Joe Clark from 1964, which if somewhat later on, likely reflected the on-air humour of the show in the decades before, announcer John Lair jokingly implored audiences 'out of consideration for his gray hairs, don't laugh at him, don't make fun of him'.[98]

Image was an important factor in establishing performer-audience relationships. Radio magazines had their own letters columns for listeners to request photographs of their favourite on-air personalities, including old-timer acts.[99] The existence of personalised postcards and souvenir photographs featuring old-timer acts, such as one of Grandpa Jones in full garb, indicates that listeners cherished both material and visual culture surrounding age masquerade.[100] Still, for most listeners, those who did not buy merchandise or radio magazines, going to a live show related to a barn dance show, whether in the audience of a live broadcast or merely as a concert in conjunction with a station or sponsor, occasionally meant seeing an old-timer act for the first time. A 1939 newspaper clipping detailing a public performance of Archie Campbell's Grandpappy noted how 'Most of [the audience]

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[97] Veronica Vasterling, 'Fear of Old Age: Comment on Linda Fisher', in *Simone de Beauvoir's Philosophy of Age: Gender, Ethics, and Time*, ed. Silvia Stoller (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 123.
[98] Radio transcription recording, '*Renfro Valley Barn Dance',* WHAS, Louisville, Kentucky, 22 August 1964, Folder 7, Box 81, Series 9, John Lair Papers, Berea College Special Collections and Archives, Berea College, Berea, Kentucky.
[99] Requests for Grandpa Jones and Campbell's Grandpappy can be found in 'Request Corner', *Rural Radio*, April 1938, 28; 'Mailbox', *Mountain Broadcast and Prairie Recorder,* March 1940, 11.
[100] WMMN souvenir photograph, c. 1938, Photographs Collections, CPM.

doubtless were familiar with Grandpappy's Gang by radio; many outsiders had never watched their antics before.'[101] Public appearances extended beyond live concerts. Announcer and producer Lowell Blanchard often staged elaborate publicity stunts starring Campbell's Grandpappy in Knoxville, including at a soap box derby, events outside shopping centres, charity drives to raise funds to fight polio, and a 1946 welcome-home for Grandpappy following Campbell's war service. Photographic reports of such events provided cheap visual publicity. Public appearances were events in which the whole family could *see* Grandpappy in the flesh rather than merely hear him over the airwaves.[102]

For some audiences, the aged aesthetic held even more significance. Ramona Jones, Grandpa Jones's wife, recalled that the night before Grandpa and His Grandchildren (his band which, confusingly, included Ramona) were to fly out to perform for troops in the Korean War, they were due to hold a leaving party when Grandpa Jones realised he had forgotten his costume. Ramona drove ninety miles to get his 'Grandpa suitcase' and missed the entire party. As she remembered, 'It was understood that no matter how bad the situation, we were always to dress in costumes to go on stage.' When landing in Daegu, South Korea, military personal asked them to put on their costumes in advance of their descent, so soldiers only saw them in their outfits.[103] Under the stresses and boredoms of military service, many troops treasured wartime entertainment in general, but for the substantial number of soldiers from the South and nation's rural heartlands, the very look of Grandpa, who wore recognisable old country garb and appeared like their own parents or

[101] Newspaper clipping, 'WNOX gives Fair New Kind of 'Ride as its Midday Merry Go Round Performs at Chilhowee', September 1939, in Archie Campbell scrapbook, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection, TAMIS.
[102] Campbell left radio for military service near the end of the war, and rode on a horse through a parade on Knoxville's main promenade on his return: Undated newspaper clipping, 'Grandpappy and Daredevil Blanchard Meet On Track', Archie Campbell scrapbook, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection, TAMIS; Newspaper clipping, 'Spark Polio Drive', January 1947, Archie Campbell scrapbook, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection, TAMIS; Undated newspaper clipping 'Grandpappy's Return to WNOX After Serving in the War Welcomed by a Huge Parade in Knoxville', Archie Campbell scrapbook, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection; Campbell and Byrd, *Archie Campbell: An Autobiography*, 84.
[103] Jones and McNeil, *Make Music While You Can*, 62-63.

grandparents, prompted memories of home. That Lonnie 'Pap' Wilson, like Jones, also entertained troops, during his time in the navy during the Second World War, suggests old-timer acts appealed to the understandable hunger for escapism, familiarity, laughter, and homeliness that servicemen keenly felt.[104]

The age aesthetic took on a similar meaning within the homely context of the barn dance show. The ensemble nature of barn dance radio meant that old-timers were hardly ever heard or seen in isolation, and old-timer acts were one cog in the broader mechanics of 'family' and 'community' presented over barn dance radio. George Hay and John Lair referred to their respective casts as their family; the *National Barn Dance* cast were known as the 'hayloft gang'. Old-timer acts, with familial titles such as Uncle, Aunt, and variations of Pappy, helped structure this sense of family. A regular format for publicity photograph of old-timer acts was to have children on their knees or surrounding them.[105] In a transcription recording of the *Grand Ole Opry*, Lonnie 'Pap' Wilson, screeches out 'That's my boy' over a kazoo solo by his occasional singing partner, and 'son', Odie.[106] Aunt Idy appeared with her whole family on *Renfro Valley*. The audience were also welcomed into this imagined radio community. Most old-timer acts addressed publicity materials to their 'friends' rather than fans.[107] Racialised ideas of what constituted the white southern family underpinned the role of old-timer acts on barn dance radio. Campbell's Grandpappy variously claimed that

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[104] In the words of a label who later released his recordings, Wilson entertained 'his buddies by portraying the character of "Pap" … "a touch of home" to the thousands of servicemen who enjoyed his "back home" entertainment': Don Pierce, sleeve notes, Lonnie 'Pap' Wilson, *The Playboy Farmer*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Starday Records SLP 217, 1963) long play record. For the significance of country music during the Second World War, see Charles K. Wolfe and James E. Akenson, eds., *Country Music Goes to War* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2005).

[105] A WNOX picture album from 1947 features Campbell with a child on his lap during a concert in Morristown, Tennessee. A series of photographs for a concert in May 1957 at an unknown location shows Grandpappy blowing balloons for children onstage: *WNOX Picture Album: Archie 'Grandpappy' Campbell* (Knoxville, Tennessee: WNOX, 1947), 3; Undated photographs, Archie Campbell scrapbook, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection, TAMIS.

[106] Radio transcription recording, 'Grand Ole Opry - Prince Albert - Part 2', 4 October 1941, WSM, Nashville, Tennessee, CMHFA.

[107] The text for a 1938 postcard from Ezra to fans begins 'Dear Friends': Postcard, 'Best Regards to Everybody - Uncle Ezra', Alka-Seltzer, 1938, Chicago, Illinois, BIO-CD-00290, Photographs Collection, CPM.

his grandfather had met Sitting Bull, that his wife's family were 'pure blue-blood' who came to America on the Mayflower, and that he had fought for the Confederacy.[108] Such audacious claims, though intentionally comedic, made firm reference to a distinctly white, Anglo-American, and southern heritage.

Publicity photographs of entire casts (or 'families') were frequently printed in radio and fan magazines. In the yearly photographs for the *National Barn Dance*, Uncle Ezra was always seated in the centre and front row, and usually surrounded by the younger female members of the cast. This photographic composition, much like that of Uncle Dave Macon and the *Opry* cast, with an 'aged' male patriarch placed forefront and centre, radiates a notional deference towards the authority of age.[109] Ezra and Macon's positions in these photographs add a fresh perspective to the most public debate in the historiography of ageing. In his pioneering history of old age in the US, David Hackett Fischer argued that until the early nineteenth century, aged male family members were seated in the centre of family portraits, with their children standing or seating around them, a trend which gradually disappeared as society became more egalitarian, and young people gave less deference to age. In a public exchange in the *New York Review of Books*, historian Laurence Stone criticised Fischer for reading too much into a narrow set of sources.[110] While barn dance cast photographs bring us no closer to resolving this debate, their gerontophilic composition suggests that there existed in the 1930s an idea that the traditional deference to age that had

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[108] Undated radio script, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection, TAMIS; Campbell and Byrd, *Archie Campbell: An Autobiography*, 99.
[109] Series of five photographs, 'The National Barn Dance', 1928-1933, Evelyn Overstake scrapbook, Box 2, Evelyn Overstake Collection, CPM; John Lair, *100 WLS Barn Dance Favourites* (Chicago: M. M. Cole Publishing Chicago, 1935), 97.
[110] David Hackett Fischer, *Growing Old in America*, Expanded edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 253. The seating arrangement partially convinced Stone, but he was critical of Fischer's extrapolation of changes to seating arrangements in Massachusetts to national trends. For the full debate see: Lawrence Stone, 'Walking over Grandma', *New York Review of Books* 24, no. 8 (12 May 1977), available at www.nybooks.com/articles/1977/05/12/walking-over-grandma/, accessed 7 September 2019; David Hackett Fischer, 'Growing Old: An Exchange', *New York Review of Books* 24, no. 14 (15 September 1977), available at www.nybooks.com/articles/1977/09/15/growing-old-an-exchange, accessed 7 September 2019.

characterised premodern society, and the Old South in particular, could be resurrected on barn dance radio.[111]

The Old-Timer Character

Loyal Jones argues that there exists such a symbiotic relationship between country music and humour that the lines between musician and comedian frequently blur. Old-timer acts, though often musically talented, were *entertainers* first and foremost. A *Grand Ole Opry* songbook from the 1940s describes Lonnie 'Pap' Wilson as 'quite a comedian', but also a guitar player, 'when he isn't playing around.'[112] In the competitive world of early radio, the skills of keeping a crowd laughing while the guitarist retuned, promoting a sponsor's product in a relatable, funny way, or filling dead-air caused by changeovers or technical difficulties, were as important as a musical talent. Old-timer acts used their aged characterisations to make audiences laugh in these interludes with jokes, skits, dialogue, vocal asides, and physical horseplay.

'Country music comedy', Jones argues, was a mix of scripted lines and improvised stage craft that radio performers inherited from vaudeville, variety, and tent show circuits. By making fun of the real and imagined differences between rural and urban life, these acts provided audiences relief from economic hardship and the perceived challenges wrought by modernity and urbanity. However, as Jones suggests, the comedy of age masquerade, like that of hillbilly mimicry was never one-dimensional:

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[111] Ezra was not the only old-timer character to receive age-based framing in this way. A Coco-Wheats-sponsored postcard features Grandpa Jones beside two younger musicians, with a personalised text from Jones on the back: 'Hello Friends; Thanks for your many nice letters. we sure like 'em. That's Pete on the left of me and Biff stands right there kin da back of me and of course as usual I'm plum in the middle [sic]': Postcard, 'Grandpa Jones', Coco-Wheat, 1940, BIO-CD-00011, Photographs Collection, CPM. A photograph souvenir for the International Hot Timers features a picture of the whole band but with a separate photograph of Uncle Buster, their old-timer band leader: Pamphlet, 'Radio station pamphlet', c. late 1930s, BIO-CD-00025, Photographs collection, CPM.

[112] Jack Harris, *Roy Acuff's Folio of Original Songs Featured Over WSM Grand Ole Opry* (Nashville, Tennessee: WSM, c. 1940s), 3.

> The persona of the grandpa or the impertinent old uncle … was partly an acceptance of the stereotype of the country person, which they threw back in the face of those who might look down on them, but it also gave them the authority of age and a wacky kind of wisdom or logic that allowed them to say outlandish things.[113]

Comedy is not a straightforward phenomenon. Radio scripts provide some sense of the content of some jokes, but not the crucial delivery style or improvised additions of a live event. For example, a joke centred around the poor hearing of an old-timer act does necessarily come across as funny from a script alone; live it assumedly would have been made funny by humorous vocalisms or slapstick physical movements. Transcription recordings of certain shows suggest some audiences laughed at some old-timer acts but can only go so far in explaining why the humour was funny. Though fan letters indicate listeners appreciated the comedy on barn dance shows, for many, jokes were considered entertainment and nothing more. Ultimately, it is important to understand how old age was a tool for, and target of, the comedy of age masquerade, while still recognising that humour is one of the more inscrutable human traits.[114]

Physical debilitation associated with old age served specific comedic purposes. Perching reading glasses on the edge of the nose allowed a performer to gaze sternly over them at younger generations; grabbing or adjusting conveyed outrage, confusion or shock.[115] Toothless smiles and misplaced false teeth were equally useful props in driving physical

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[113] Jones, 'Death Comes in Threes', 27. For Jones on the function of comedy in country music, see Loyal Jones, *Country Music Humorists and Comedians* (Champaign, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2008).

[114] For humour in the South, see M. Thomas Inge and Edward J. Piacentino, eds., *The Humor of the Old South* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001); James C. Cobb, '"Damn Brother, I Don't Believe I'd A-Told That!": Humor and the Cultural Identity of the American South', *Southern Cultures* 1, no. 4 (Summer 1995): 481-92; Wade Hall, *Reflections of the Civil War in Southern Humor* (Montgomery, Alabama: NewSouth Books, 2015); Ed Piacentino, ed., *Southern Frontier Humor: New Approaches* (Jackson: University of Press of Mississippi, 2013).

[115] A press photograph of Lonnie 'Pap' Johnson with other members of Acuff's band shows him leaning over with his reading glasses in shock at what the other members: *Hawkshaw Hawkins: Star of the Grand Ole Opry* (Nashville, Tennessee: Acuff-Rose Publications, c. 1930s), 4.

gags.[116] Poor hearing was grist to a comic's mill, being a vehicle for miscommunication, repetition and clever wordplay. In a farcical skit on WROL's *Dinnerbell*, for example, a cast member asks Campbell's Grandpappy about a 'cigar butt on the floor', which he repeatedly mishears for a ruder phrase.[117] Campbell also built jokes around his character's rheumatism, pneumonia, tuberculosis, and sore feet, ailments which, if not exclusively derived from old age, were associated with ageing.[118] Similarly, Old Joe Clark regularly referenced illnesses and ailments in his act, including a wart on his heart. *Renfro Valley* host John Lair even employed the verb 'crippling' to describe Clark's walk, suggesting that some creative anthimeria was needed to describe the visual comedy of age masquerade over the aural medium of radio. [119]

Like physical manifestations of old age, senility was used as a channel for humour. Campbell's Grandpappy, and his never-heard or -seen elderly wife, were depicted as ignorant fools who did not go to school or learn to spell, who were dangerous behind car

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[116] Archie Campbell was a specialist in teeth theatrics, whether false teeth or missing teeth: Undated WROL radio script, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection, TAMIS; Undated newspaper clipping, 'Songstress and Part of Those 4000 Hillbillies', in Archie Campbell scrapbook in Box 1, Campbell Family Collection; Newspaper clipping, WNOX advertisement, September 1944, in Archie Campbell scrapbook in Box 1, Campbell Family Collection.

[117] Another undated WNOX script features Campbell's Grandpappy confused by announcer Lowell Blanchard who had kissed a girl 'between the auditorium and backstage'. Another undated WROL script involves Grandpappy repeatedly mishearing his colleagues. A photograph of a live concert of WNOX shows Grandpa putting his hand to his ear as if he cannot hear what announcer Lowell Blanchard said: Radio script, *Dinnerbell*, WROL, Knoxville, Tennessee, 7 March 1950, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection, TAMIS; Undated WNOX radio script, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection, TAMIS; Undated WROL radio script, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection, TAMIS; Undated newspaper clipping, 'WNOX Radio Jamboree', Archie Campbell scrapbook, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection.

[118] Campbell makes light of Grandpappy's medical conditions in two 1949 skits. While Grandpappy is working in a restaurant, he is asked by a young cast member if they have frog's legs. Grandpappy replies 'No, rheumatism makes me walk this way:' In another skit, Grandpappy tells listeners 'First I had pneumonia, then I had tuberculosis then I had Rheumatism … Oh I wasn't sick, I was in a spelling bee': Television script, *Country Playhouse*, WROL, Knoxville, Tennessee, 25 November 1949, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection, TAMIS; Radio script, 5 December 1949, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection, TAMIS; Undated WROL radio script, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection, TAMIS.

[119] Lair tells listeners 'here's another one of the old timers, he comes crippling down here every Saturday night': Radio transcription recording, 'Renfro Valley Barn Dance', WHAS, Louisville, Kentucky, 22 August 1964, Folder 7, Box 81, Series 9, John Lair Papers, BCSCA.

wheels, and generally seen as unintelligent hillbillies.[120] Though such traits were also found in portrayals of 'idiotic' hillbillies generally, when Grandpappy behaved in such a way, such issues were played down as markers of generational difference rather than commentaries on social class. Memory loss was another useful comic device. One script features Grandpappy recalling his war service, forgetting what he was talking about, and abruptly change the topic to 'fighting Indians on the Prairies.'[121] The age context enhanced the standard physical slapstick of set pieces. A 1947 home video of a live WNOX performance shows Grandpappy dancing on stage with a female audience member. When he swings her around, he becomes distracted and does not realise she has span away from him.[122] In summary, assumptions of the relationship between age, frailty and infirmity served a pragmatic function in the comedy of age masquerade.

By contrast, some old-timer acts played up to notions of seniority and authority associated with old age. Uncle Ezra, often labelled as 'philosophical', 'wise', or 'sage', made several wartime broadcasts in the 1940s in which he ruminated with some pathos on the troubled state of the modern world. Campbell kept several notes of what he termed 'Pappy Philosophy', and published a column of home-spun wisdom with comic twists entitled 'Grandpappy Says' in a Knoxville newspaper.[123] Philosophy, nonetheless, was closely linked to comedy. Old-timer acts Herb and Hank imparted 'wisdom and wit' to their

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[120] Radio script, *Dinnerbell*, WROL, Knoxville, Tennessee, 14 November 1950, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection, TAMIS; Radio script, *Dinnerbell*, WROL, Knoxville, Tennessee, 20 March 1950; Undated WNOX radio script, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection, TAMIS.

[121] Undated radio script, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection, TAMIS. In an undated WROL script Grandpappy keeps interrupting his own story and forgetting what he was talking about: Undated WROL radio script, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection.

[122] Similar acts of tom-foolery can be seen in film and publicity photographs of Grandpappy onstage looking bewildered by yo-yos, television tape in a recording studio, and a telephone dial: 'Lynn Davis Home Movie: The WNOX Midday Merry Go Round', c. 1947, Campbell Family Collection, TAMIS, available at www,vimeo.com/116429644, accessed 31 January 2018; Undated newspaper clipping, Archie Campbell scrapbook, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection; Undated publicity photographs, Archie Campbell, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection.

[123] Handwritten note, 'Pappy Philosophy', Archie Campbell, 7 December 1949, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection, TAMIS; Series of undated newspaper clippings, 'Grandpa Says', in Archie Campbell scrapbook, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection.

radio listeners.[124] The proverbial shaking of the head at the younger generations frequently preceded these philosophical offerings. In the 1947 issue of *Future: The Magazine for Young Men*, the front cover of which shows a decidedly unyoung Grandpappy on a fishing boat, the old-timer act provides generic philosophical nuggets for young men.[125] In a *Renfro Valley Barn Dance* broadcast, Old Joe Clark can be heard moaning that 'you just don't know nothing you young 'uns do you?'[126] In a brochure for the *Midday Merry Go-Round* show, Campbell's Grandpappy chastised younger cast members for having no respect for their elders. An undated handwritten philosophical musing found amongst Campbell's papers is a line that he probably used as Grandpappy: 'the young have no respect for old age unless its bottled'.[127]

Contradictorily, while some acts were physical incapacitated or sage-like, others played with the comedic image of elders acting out with surprising virility. Publicity photographs of Grandpa Jones, Walter L. Ligget, and an unidentified old-timer act for the *Old Dominion Barn Dance* over WRVA in Richmond, Virginia, all show the performers with legs in the air, energetically striking their banjos, and with bodies spread out [Appendix 3.2 and 3.3].[128] In transcription recordings of *Renfro Valley*, a whirlwind of shouting, stomping, and laughter can be heard as Old Joe Clark enters the stage, suggesting that he came on dancing to the audience's amusement. The sound and optics of old men dancing,

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[124] 'What's This, 'Bout a Postman's Holiday?', *Rural Radio*, February 1938, 9.
[125] Magazine cutting, *Future: The Magazine for Young Men*, May/June 1947, front cover, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection, TAMIS.
[126] Radio transcription recording, 'Renfro Valley Barn Dance', WHAS, Louisville, Kentucky, 15 June 1957, Folder 3, Box 81, John Lair Papers, BCSCA.
[127] Undated brochure, *Midday Merry Go-Round*, (Knoxville, Tennessee: WNOX), 6, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection, TAMIS; Handwritten joke, Archie Campbell, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection.
[128] A frequently recycled publicity photograph of Grandpa Jones from the 1940s shows him with one leg in the air, energetically striking his banjo. In a 1942 *Grand Ole Opry* publication, Walter L. Liggett, old-timer act for Oscar Stone and His Possum Hunters, is shown furiously strumming his banjo with his animated body stretched wide and far. An almost identical photograph exists of an unidentified old-timer act for the *Old Dominion Barn Dance*: Thurston Moore, ed., *Country & Western Scrapbook*, Vol. 11 (Denver, Colorado: Heather Publisher, 1961), 41; *Song Favourites of WSM Grand Ole Opry* (Chicago: M.M. Cole Publishing Co., 1942); Photograph, 'Old Dominion Barn Dance Cast', c. 1940s/1950s, BIO-PR-00084, Photographs Collection, CPM.

even with their prop canes, indicated to audiences the sheer revitalising power of old-time music. During a televised rendering of *Renfro Valley*, Old Joe Clark succumbs to the energy of a hoe-down, and dances wildly, perhaps drawing from the religious tent or healing revivals of the period in which the Holy Spirit revitalised the disabled, sick and elderly.[129] Other cast members feigned surprise at this virility. In one script, despite several claims to the contrary from his younger colleagues, Campbell's Grandpappy insists he is not 'too old to dance' and could 'out dance' any of them.[130] A younger colleague asks Grandpappy in another script 'What makes you think you're so tough?', to which he responds 'Listen, you're looking at an old Indian fighter'. When asked why he stopped fighting Indians, Grandpappy proudly responds 'I run out of old Indians.'[131]

Jokes such as this built on wider concerns about the manliness of the generation living after the end of frontier. Indeed, aged male virility was one building block of the broader lasciviousness of old-timer characters. Lewd jokes and the figurative or literal chasing of young women were common features of the 'dirty old man' incarnation of the old-timer act. Campbell's hypersexualised Grandpappy continuously objectified young women. Home film footage of a live *Midday Merry Go Round* broadcast from around 1947 shows Grandpappy attempting to kiss a young female audience member.[132] In a 1950 *Dinnerbell* script for Knoxville's WROL, Grandpappy, discussing child-rearing with a

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[129] John Lair, *Renfro Valley Folks*, VHS, Renfro Valley, Kentucky, c. 1957, Item 3: SC-BT-377-004, Box 82, John Lair Papers, BCSCA; Michael Ann Williams, *Staging Tradition: John Lair and Sarah Gertrude Knott* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 84. For the long history of older people as participants in tent healing revivals, see Josh McMullen, *Under the Big Top: Big Tent Revivalism and American Culture, 1885-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 48-108; Dickson D. Bruce Jr., *And They All Sang Hallelujah: Plain-Folk Camp-Meeting Religion, 1800-1845* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1974), 78-106. Ironically, Clark came from a conservative religious family in East Tennessee, where he was taught that 'If you run around up and down the road with a banjo or a fiddle … you were Hell bound': Interview with Archie Campbell, 1 February 1968, Country Music Foundation Oral History Project, CMHFA.

[130] A publicity photograph shows Grandpappy aggressively squaring up to another cast member: Undated WROL radio script, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection, TAMIS; Undated publicity photograph, Archie Campbell, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection.

[131] Undated WROL radio script, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection, TAMIS.

[132] 'Lynn Davis Home Movie: The WNOX Midday Merry Go Round', c. 1947, Campbell Family Collection, TAMIS, available at www.vimeo.com/116429644, accessed 31/01/2018.

younger male performer, reveals he 'like girl babies best … Especially those born around twenty years ago.'[133] Similarly, in another script his stage partner asks Grandpappy why he calls his car 'modern girl'. Grandpappy replies 'it's a runabout, it's very fast and it smokes in public.'[134] Building on old vaudeville double-acts, the hypersexualised Grandpappy was often paired with a 'straight' younger partner who softened the lewd humour: 'I don't know why an old man like you has to always be going out chasing women', a cast member asks Grandpappy in a 1950 script.[135] Significantly, the flipside to Grandpappy's attraction to younger females was his repulsion to his own (never heard or seen) elderly wife, who supposedly lost her looks long ago.[136]

Blue comedy could easily upset the moral expectations of radio audiences, or, more importantly, worry sponsors. As the radio medium grew, Christian and conservative

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[133] In other scripts Grandpappy advices young men how to 'get girls', dresses well so he can go 'chasing women', recommends a blue-eyed secretary to his friend as she is 'built so nice', responds to the saying that 'a man is only as old as he looks' with 'If he don't do anything but look, he's too old', and jokes about 'playing ball' during a WNOX segment on baseball. Reportage of Campbell's live show also noted how he 'perks up … when a beautiful girl smiles at him during a broadcast'. A photograph of grandpappy shows him with his arms around a young female audience member onstage at a live concert: Radio script, *Dinnerbell*, WROL, Knoxville, Tennessee, 21 March 1950, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection; Radio script, *Playhouse*, 11 March 1950; Radio script *Playhouse*, 18 March 1950; Undated WROL script; Undated WROL script, in Box 1, Campbell Family Collection; Undated WNOX radio script, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection, TAMIS; Undated newspaper clipping, 'Girls and 'Grandpappy' on WNOX Schedule', Archie Campbell scrapbook, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection; Undated publicity photograph, Archie Campbell, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection.

[134] Radio script, *Dinnerbell*, WROL, Knoxville, Tennessee, 20 March 1950, in Box 1, Campbell Family Collection, TAMIS.

[135] A similar scenario can be heard in a 1948 *Renfro Valley Barn Dance* transcription in which announcer John Lair, when changing between Old Joe Clark and the Coon Creek Girls, tells Clark that he 'may as well stick around, because these four girls, gee God … you won't be able to sit down', to which the pair laugh at the sexual subtext: Radio script, *Playhouse*, 18 March 1950, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection, TAMIS; Radio transcription recording, 'Renfro Valley Barn Dance', WHAS, Louisville, Kentucky, 27 November 1948, Folder 28, Box 90, Series 9, John Lair Papers, BCSCA.

[136] Campbell often made jokes at the expense of Grandpappy's elderly wife and older women in general. He regularly advised younger men to avoid marriage. In one script Campbell laments the marriage of a couple after fifty years together: 'I suppose the old fellow was too weak to hold out any long.' In another, Grandpappy says the fact that a lot of people are still getting married proves that the country is 'still the home of the brave': Television script, *Country Playhouse*, WROL, Knoxville, Tennessee, 10 March 1950, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection, TAMIS; Undated WROL radio script, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection.

moralists, around the country but notably in the South, increasingly lobbied regulators over radio broadcasting of improper language, political dissent, contentious religious or scientific content, and sex. In 1927, the segregationist ex-Governor and Democrat Senator for South Carolina, Coleman Blease, questioned the Senate as to what the religion of the Federal Radio Commission would be and whether it would uphold 'Christian values'. It is telling that around the same time that Campbell's Grandpappy in one skit was openly bragging on-air about kissing his friend's wife, there was public uproar and a threat of licence removal over a heretically raunchy 1937 radio skit depicting sex symbol Mae West in the biblical role of Eve.[137] Old age, if filtered through double standards of older men as sexual but essentially harmless old fools, gave performers an unspoken licence to perform lewd material over an increasingly censured medium. Of course, this licence had its limitations. In the 1940s, Campbell, as Grandpappy, played a gig at a Parent-Teacher Association event in Whittier, North Carolina in which he jumped into the audience, kissing unsuspecting women. Campbell was punched by an angry male audience member and told to 'Get up on stage where you belong.' In the bizarre heat of the moment, and echoing Preston Brooks' famous cane beating of Charles Sumner in the US Senate in 1856, some of his bandmates encouraged Campbell to defend himself with his prop walking stick. On reflection, Campbell believed the young man who hit him had simply got 'enthused with the act … As far as he knew, I was an old man up on the stage.'[138]

In a subtler fashion, male old-timer acts sanitised the presentation of female sexuality on barn dance shows. Paternalistic concerns about the decency and safety of young

[137] For the Blease quote and more on radio regulations, see Marvin R. Bensman, *The Beginning of Broadcast Regulation in the Twentieth Century* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2000), 193; Quentin J. Schultze, *Christianity and the Mass Media in America: Toward a Democratic Accommodation* (East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 2003), 139-46; John E. Semonche, *Censoring Sex: A Historical Journey Through American Media* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 185-186; Radio script, c. late 1930s, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection, TAMIS.

[138] Interview with Archie Campbell, by John Rumble, 1 February 1968, Country Music Foundation Oral History Project, CMHFA. For an analysis of the Brooks-Sumner affair from an age perspective, see Marcus G. Harvey, 'The Cultural Significance of Old Age in the American South, 1830-1900' (PhD dissertation, University of Florida, 2001), iii-vii.

women in the music industry were particularly potent over southern barn dance radio. Many religious and conservative Americans believed 'hillbilly' musical culture was riddled with vulgarity, violence and deviance that was particularly threatening to women. Musicians concocted innovative ways to assure audiences that the industry respected the 'honour' of young women. Roy Acuff recalled that early in his career he received letters from fans concerned the propriety of female bandmate Rachel Veach in his otherwise all-male Smoky Mountain Boys band. To resolve the matter, Acuff rechristened guitarist Beecher Ray Kirby as Brother Oswald, and spun the story that Oswald and Veach were siblings to ensure audiences she was safely accompanied by a family member on tour.[139] The grandfatherly presence of 'Pap' Wilson in the same band may have served a similar function. While Pap's familial presence 'protected' Veach, he also provided a 'safe' vessel for blue humor. During one skit with Acuff, Pap claims it is too hot onstage and so takes his clothes off before being stopped by Acuff. 'We're not putting on that kind of show', Acuff warns him, to which Pap replies 'No, but brother I'm willin'!'[140] Fears about women in hillbilly environments were akin to those concerning female entertainers in warzones. During Grandpa Jones' tour for troops in Korea, soldiers were particularly enamoured by his bandmates Ramona Jones and Mary Klick, the latter of whom *Billboard* described in a report of their tour as 'pert and pretty.'[141] When the regiment's captain thanked radio station WRVA on the troupe's return, he made a special point to mention their 'lively humor, good songs, top rate showmanship - and honest-to-goodness real live American girls.'[142] Arguably, a grandfatherly chaperone helped navigate the double standards expected of femininity in wartime. The two women

[139] Hugh Cherry interview with Roy Acuff and Hugh Cherry, 4 March 1967, referenced in Schlappi, *Roy Acuff, the Smoky Mountain Boy*, 73.
[140] Schlappi, 84.
[141] Ralph J. Krzyzak, 'U.S. Front-Line Troupers Aid UN Morale in Korea', *Billboard*, 4 August 1951, 3.
[142] Jones and McNeil, *Make Music While You Can*, 73.

could be presented as sexual objects as long as conservative anxieties about their propriety were eased by the presence of a familial older patriarch.[143]

Female old-timer acts presented an equally varied display of aged femininities. Kristine McCusker explains how performer Sarah Ophelia Colley Cannon drew on audiences' familiarity with a host of 'spinster' characters on radio and in popular culture to craft her famous Minnie Pearl character. Though not as old as Campbell's Grandpappy, Pearl was clearly intended to be *older* than her female colleagues. A central aspect of her comedy involved her chasing men in vain. McCusker posits that as marriage was so central a pillar of rural southern life, unmarried older women were perceived as repulsive, unwomanly and as a laughing stock, tropes that Cannon played with throughout her career. Sarie and Sallie, a pair of female old-timer acts on the *Opry* who were inspirations for the Pearl character, also played with expectations of 'old maids'. A photograph of them eagerly listening on a phone printed in *Rural Radio* magazine symbolises well McCusker's analysis of how gossip was central to these spinster characters. Another photograph in the same magazine shows Sarie dancing with Sam McGhee, a young *Opry* performer, even slightly lifting her skirt in the process [Appendix 3.4].[144] Evidently, the similar themes of mild flirtatiousness and virility extended to these portrayals of aged femininity.

Other female old-timer acts centred their humour more around (grand)motherhood than sexuality. Old Joe Clark believed that the core difference between his act and Aunt Idy Harper was that 'Hers was homespun, just a mama taking care of a young one.'[145] The bizarre act of Aunt Idy Harper, husband Uncle Juney, and their overgrown 'child', Little

[143] Historian Marilyn E. Hegarty argues that women, both entertainers and servicewomen, were expected to be pure, Christian, uncorrupted, and patriotically asexual, while at the same time also serving male desires, literally and theatrically, for the national good: Marilyn E. Hegarty, *Victory Girls, Khaki-Wackies, and Patriotutes: The Regulation of Female Sexuality During World War II* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 89.
[144] *Rural Radio*, February 1938, 12. For McCusker's analysis of Minnie Pearl and Sarie and Sallie, amongst a few other female old-timer acts, see McCusker, *Lonesome Cowgirls and Honky Tonk Angels*, 103-123.
[145] Interview with Old Joe Clark, by John Rumble, 3 December 1985, Country Music Foundation Oral History Project, CMHFA.

Clifford, is emblematic of how gender was a crucial factor in age masquerade. Harper was as powerful, asexual matriarch, who doted after Clifford, never stopped talking, and continually chided Juney. In one 1939 skit, Harper reprimands Juney for mortgaging their car without her authority, and tells him to 'shut up' when he protests.[146] The figure of the old, overbearing mother/wife, and the weak, emasculated old husband, starkly contrasted with the elderly males of Old Joe Clark and Grandpappy and their seldom-seen 'wives'. Aunt Sarah, a character on several St. Louis, Missouri stations, performed a similar function to Idy: an argumentative, gossipy, widow from Hidalgo, Texas [Appendix 3.5].[147] Overall, although similarly negative assumptions about sexual desire among the aged crossed the gender line, old female characters tended to be a more threatening, even revolting, presence, while old male acts were merely branded as silly old fools.

Made-up old characters on barn dance radio often came from equally imagined places. Though many centred around a fictional barn, as with *National Barn Dance*'s 'Hayloft', some were set in larger locales, such as the eponymous *Renfro Valley*. The show's theme song 'Take Me Back To Renfro Valley' is emblematic of the themes of home, change and loss which characterised barn dance shows generally. The song's protagonist, having left Renfro Valley years ago, returns to find that 'Gone are old familiar faces, all the friends I used to know / Things have changed in Renfro Valley, since the days of long ago.'[148] Old-timers such as Aunt Idy and Old Joe Clark were stewards for places like Renfro Valley, but also markers for the old-timey nature of barn dance shows in general.

Most radio towns were fictional. Country stores were equally popular locations for old-timer acts. 'Pop' Myres headed up *Saturday Night Shindig at the Old General Store* over

[146] Radio transcription recording, 'Renfro Valley Barn Dance', WLW, Cincinnati, Ohio, 18 November 1939, Folder 5, Box 80, Series 9, John Lair Papers, BCSCA.
[147] 'KWK Aunt Sarah Photo', St. Louis Media History Archive, available at http://artifacts.stlmediahistory.org/items/show/884, accessed 3 May 2018.
[148] *Renfro Valley* performer Linda Parker recorded a version of 'Take Me Back To Renfro Valley' (Conqueror 8164, 1933).

WFAA in Dallas, Texas.[149] Pat Buttram told WLS listeners he imagined he was back at his country store in Alabama, just talking to 'old cronies', including himself as Uncle Josh, the aged proprietor of his 'radio school'.[150] Minnie Pearl's 'town' of Grinder's Switch had its own newspaper which listeners could buy.[151] Uncle Luke Gray was the star of *Smackout* over Chicago's WMAQ, set in a store of the same name on a junction called the Crossroads of the Air.[152] Indeed, midwestern barn dance shows, like southern ones, usually were set in an imaginary small-town featuring an old-timer act, such as the 'old maid' character of Tillie Boggs from Sunset Corner who appeared on the *Iowa Barn Dance* over Des Moines station WHO.[153] Even the bigger broadcasters got in on the act. *The National Farm and Home Hour,* broadcast on behalf of the newly created Radio Division of the United States Department of Agriculture, poached the old-timer stars Uncle Luke and Aunt Mirandy of *Smackout,* and relocated them to the equally fictional Persimmon Hollow.[154] Across the nation, although particularly over southern barn dance radio, old-timers were gatekeepers to what radio scholars term the 'theatre of the mind'; neighbourly and familiar, they guided audiences through their fictional radio hometowns. Silas Tewksberry, an old-timer character for duo Monk and Sam, owned the imaginary Valley View Farm where 'seeds of happiness are sown and which grow into songs of joy, helpfulness, and kindness, mingled with humor and happy harmony.' In one publication, Tewksberry (referred to informally as 'Si'), welcomed listeners to his farm by telling them 'Wal, Good Day Neighbor! Drop in When Yer by the farm agin [sic].'[155]

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[149] *Song and Picture Barn Dance Magazine*, January 1948, 12.
[150] George C. Biggar, 'Alabama Technique', *Prairie Farmer's New WLS Weekly*, 16 February 1935, 5.
[151] McCusker, *Lonesome Cowgirls and Honky Tonk Angels,* 103-123.
[152] The Jordans moved their entertainment to the equally imagined community of Wistful Vista for their more popular, and less music-based network radio show *Fibber McGhee and Molly*: Dunning, *On the Air,* 246-251.
[153] 'Husband's Heart Was Filled With Joy', *Mountain Broadcast and Prairie Recorder*, November 1939, 1.
[154] Craig, '"The More They Listen, the More They Buy" Radio and the Modernizing of Rural America, 1930-1939', 6.
[155] Hanesen and Johnson, *A Trip Thru Monk and Sam's Song Farm*, 22.

Whether centred in townships, farms, barns, or country stores, these fantasy locales broadly referred to notions of 'small-town' life.[156] The flourishing depictions of small towns in cinema, literature and journalism at mid-century both reflected and prompted wider concerns about the decline of the real 'small-town'. Presidents frequently cited their small-town beginnings, such as Warren Harding who regularly referenced his upbringing in Marion, Ohio.[157] Intellectuals of the period were equally anxious about the small-town. Robert and Helen Lynd's 1929 *Middletown: A Study in Contemporary American Culture* inspired a whole sub-discipline of sociological studies of small-towns.[158] Radio dramas reflected these anxieties with rural soap opera and situation comedies centred around idyllic, fictional small-towns, such as Pineville Ridge, Arkansas, the home of New York station WNBC's Lum and Abner.[159] These fears, if prominent in national popular culture, were acutely felt in and associated with the South. Concerns about rural flight of predominantly young people from the countryside to cities and out of the South and Midwest, particularly

[156] Population studies scholars have called into question different definitions of the 'small-town'. Since 1910, the Federal Census Bureau has labelled sites with populations of 2,500 and above as 'urban'. Rural areas are defined as sites with populations below 2,500, with small-town belonging in the upper limit of this category. Naturally, such distinctions elide cultural understandings of the small-town. As Robert Boyce argues, such an arbitrary cut off also excludes the fractionally larger sized towns of just over 2,500 inhabitants. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) retains this definition of rural though concedes that notions of rurality and small-townships are multi-dimensional: Robert Boyce, *The Great Interwar Crisis and the Collapse of Globalization* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 80; Louise Reynnells, *What Is Rural?* (Washington D.C.: USDA, National Agricultural Library, Rural Information Center, 2016).

[157] A famous, if potentially apocryphal quote from President Warren Harding captures some of the associations made between the President and the small-town: 'I am a man of limited talents from a small town. I don't seem to grasp that I am president': Phillip G. Payne, *Dead Last: The Public Memory of Warren G. Harding's Scandalous Legacy* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2009), 20-47. Numerous novels and films of this period were centred around small-town life, including some of the most popular of the day such as Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street* in 1920 and Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life* in 1946.

[158] Robert S. Lynd and Helen M. Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in Modern American Culture* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1929).

[159] Like Renfro Valley, Pineville Ridge became a real place after the citizens of Waters, Arkansas, the inspiration for the fictional town, voted to change its name in honour of the show: see Randal L. Hall, *Lum and Abner: Rural America and the Golden Age of Radio* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007).

following the Depression, and the 'greying' of left-behind communities, if not entirely reflective of reality, were prevalent in public discourse.[160]

The towns connected to old-timer acts were not always fictional: Grandpa Jones regularly mentioned his actual hometown of Niagara, Kentucky; the character of Grandpappy was tied to Campbell's real home of Bull's Gap, Tennessee.[161] Significantly, some listeners believed that Bull's Gap was not a real town. In an interview with Campbell, a Knoxville reporter noted that 'Hundreds of Pap's radio fans have accused him of inventing the name of his boyhood home. But the town's as real as Pap himself.'[162] Old-timer acts were also tied to more vague ideas of the 'The Mountains' or 'The Hills'. Grandpappy was known variously as 'The Old Man of the Mountains' and a 'sprightly "oldster" from the hills'. Grandpappy's band, like many other younger hillbilly performers, were given similar mountainous provenance ('a couple of boys from the backhills') but yet there was something unique, even biblical, about the image of Grandpappy as the old man from the mountains.[163] In publicity photographs, performers conducted discernibly rural, traditional, or southern everyday activities: old-timer acts variously cultivated tomatoes, sold goose harnesses, invited whole audiences to go fishing, whittled wood, and cooked biscuits and

[160] For discussions of the effects of the Great Migration on the age demographics of small towns in the South and Midwest, see Jason Long and Henry E. Siu, 'Refugees From Dust and Shrinking Land: Tracking the Dust Bowl Migrants', Working Paper (National Bureau of Economic Research, March 2016), available at http://www.nber.org/papers/w22108, accessed 26 September 2019; James N. Gregory, *American Exodus: The Dust Bowl Migration and Okie Culture in California* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 180-200; James N. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill: University North Carolina Press, 2005), 73-117.

[161] Moore, *Country & Western Scrapbook*, 41; Undated WNOX radio script, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection, TAMIS; Undated WROL radio script, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection.

[162] Undated newspaper clipping, Vic Weals, 'Home Folks', Archie Campbell scrapbook, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection, TAMIS.

[163] *Archie 'Grandpappy' Campbell and the Old Timers* (Knoxville, Tennessee: WNOX, n.d.) Box 1, Campbell Family Collection, TAMIS; Undated brochure, *Midday Merry-Go Round*, (Knoxville, Tennessee: WNOX), 6 in Box 1, Campbell Family Collection.

gravy [Appendix 3.6].[164] Old-timer acts also explicitly toyed with the notion that a creeping modernity was detrimental to their imagined small-towns and American society. In one WROL script, Campbell's Grandpappy complains that 'prices are going up these here days', particularly the cost of meat.[165]

Indeed, these associations between old-timer acts and modernity could be straight forward, but others were more complex. A promotional postcard for the *National Barn Dance* illustrates many of these complexities. Uncle Ezra 'broadcast' his segments from 'Station E.Z.R.A' in a fictional small-town that hosted the Hayloft gang, so the postcard features the town's main street, a portrait of the aged Ezra hanging from the skyline, and a solitary old man crossing the street. The combination of Ezra, the old man on the street, and the lack of any other inhabitants suggest a small-town in decline. Still, recognisable sites of the rural community remain (horses, a grocers and feed store, a tinsmith, and a small

[164] A publicity photograph of Campbell's Grandpappy shows him cultivating tomatoes. Grandpappy Nerit wrote a letter to *National Hillbilly News* to sell to readers his 'goose harness'. During a 1941 *Renfro Valley Barn Dance* broadcast, Aunt Idy can be heard encouraging the whole audience to go fishing with her. Uncle Rufe is shown whittling wood in a WMMN album: Undated publicity photograph, Archie Campbell, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection, TAMIS; *National Hill Billy News*, May 1946, 17; Radio transcription recording, '*Renfro Valley Barn Dance',* WLS, Cincinnati, Ohio, 29 March 1941, Folder 6, Box 80, Series 9, John Lair Papers, BCSCA; N. L. Royster, *WMMN Family Album* (Fairmont, West Virginia: WWMN, 1941), 14. Campbell's Grandpappy cooked and ate biscuits and gravy on-air. Though the 'southerness' of biscuits and gravy is hotly debated, listeners in Tennessee would have recognised biscuits and gravy as an integral part of Tennessean life: Undated script, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection; Elizabeth S. D. Engelhardt, *A Mess of Greens: Southern Gender and Southern Food* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 51-83; Marcie Cohen Ferris, '"The Deepest Reality of Life": Southern Sociology, the WPA, and Food in the New South', *Southern Cultures* 18, no. 2: Food (2012): 6-31; Angela Jill Cooley, *To Live and Dine in Dixie: The Evolution of Urban Food Culture in the South* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2015).

[165] Undated WROL radio script, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection, TAMIS. Old Joe Clark made almost identical complaints about the cost of petrol and, morbidly, the cost of funerals: Radio transcription recording, *Renfro Valley Barn Dance*, WHAS, Louisville, Kentucky, 22 August 1964, Folder 7, Box 81, Series 9, John Lair Papers, BCSCA; Radio transcription recording, '*Renfro Valley Barn Dance',* WHAS, Louisville, Kentucky, 15 June 1957, Folder 3, Box 81, John Lair Papers, BCSCA.

church), even if they sit uneasily alongside signs of modernity, such as automobiles and, significantly, Ezra's own radio antennae [Appendix 3.7].[166]

In amongst these imagined places lay depictions of economic hardship and poverty. Campbell's Grandpappy was teased for having rats in his house and regularly owing money to other cast members. Grandpa Jones and Earl Bollick's Uncle Josh wore ill-fittingly large trousers with holes in. Jones proudly stated to journalists that he bought his guitar for seventy-five cents, and had only 15 cents in his pockets.[167] Though it is unclear whether this focus on poverty characterised old-timer acts as having grown up poor, or become poor in old age, this discernible pride in poverty foreshadows some of the rustic authenticity associated with country music.[168]

Reception

The theatricality of age masquerade was referenced in publicity and merchandise with images of costumed acts placed alongside those of the young, usually suited, performers who played them. The same Alka-Seltzer-sponsored postcard featuring Uncle Ezra's hometown shows the aged uncle on one side, and on the reverse a photograph and biography of Pat Barrett, the performer. 'Here is the way "Uncle Ezra" looks in real life', the postcard reads, 'and the answer to some of the questions so often asked him. His real name

[166] Postcard, 'Best Regards to Everybody - Uncle Ezra', Alka-Seltzer, 1938, Chicago, Illinois, BIO-CD-00290, Photographs Collection, CPM.
[167] Undated radio script, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection, TAMIS; Undated WROL radio script, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection; Television script, *Country Playhouse*, WROL, Knoxville, Tennessee, 1 November 1949. In 1962, a journalist observed that 'Between [Grandpa Jones'] songs about his dog, Rattler, "Mountain Dew", and 15 cents in his pockets, he keeps up a steady patter of wisecracks': Lowell Schreyer, 'Early American Subject for Varied Presentations', *Mankato Free Press Press* [Mankato, Minnesota], 8 October 1962, 11.
[168] Ironically, the 'recollections' of these fake elders are precursors to the stream of 'we-never-had-nothing' autobiographies of ageing wealthy country stars such as Dolly Parton, Roy Acuff, Loretta Lynn and Johnny Cash in the 1980s and 1990s: Pamela Fox, *Natural Acts: Gender, Race, and Rusticity in Country Music* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), 119.

is Patrick Barrett'.[169] A 1938 *Rural Radio* cover story on Uncle Ezra details how Barrett, not Ezra, had recently bought several farms, and was managing them successfully, to the surprise of locals, yet the images showed Ezra riding tractors and pushing wheelbarrows of hay [Appendix 3.8].[170] Numerous comparable examples exist for different acts.[171] The 'reveal' of female old-timer acts tended to stress their real-life beauty and dignity. Shari Morning who played Tillie Boggs was referred to as an 'attractive brunette'.[172] There was also regular commentary on the youth of the real-live wives of male acts. A WNOX album features a photograph of Mary Lee Lewis, the young wife of Archie Campbell, and is

[169] Postcard, 'Best Regards to Everybody - Uncle Ezra', Alka-Seltzer, 1938, Chicago, Illinois, BIO-CD-00290, Photographs Collection, CPM.
[170] Edythe Dixon, 'They Said He Couldn't Farm! WLS's Uncle Ezra of National Barn Dance', *Rural Radio*, May 1938, 5. *Rural Radio* ran a similar story on Barrett, out of costume, visiting a zoo: Leo Boulette, 'The Panda on WLS', *Rural Radio*, June 1938, 5.
[171] Many songbooks and keepsakes relating to Grandpa Jones show the character and performer. In one songbook the caption reads 'Grandpa as he looked a long time ago - and I mean a long time ago.' Another songbook features Jones' real-life elderly parents. A RCA Victor pamphlet featuring Jones reads: 'Known as 'Grandpa' to his thousands of fans because of his old-man get up, Louis M. Jones is nevertheless only 40 … you have only to listen to his RCA Victor recordings to be convinced he's no grandfather': Photograph, 'Grandpa and Louis Marshal Jones Promotional', c. 1930s., BIO-PR-00317, Photographs Collection, CPM; Jones, *Star of Grand Ole Opry - Hill and Country Songs*, 16-17; Jones, *Star of Grand Ole Opry - Harmonies of the Hill Country*, 21; Souvenir folio, 'RCA Victor country and western caravan special recording artists', c. early 1950s (Madison, Tennessee: RCA Victor Records/Jamboree Attractions, Inc.), SP-095009, Rare Books and Scores Collection, Center for Popular Music; Thurston Moore, *The Hillbilly and Western Scrapbook*, vol. 1 (Cincinnati, Ohio: Scrapbook Publishers, 1949), 30; Jones, *Grandpa Jones: The Kentuck' Yodeler*, No. 2, 2. In a WNOX Picture Album, the white old-timer act Uncle Tom is pictured without his makeup in a suit. An undated newspaper clipping from Campbell's personal collections reads: 'The popular 'old' man of WNOX really is only 21 years old, despite his title of Grandpappy … [he is] probably the youngest 'old man' on radio'. A songbook for WROL's *Country Playhouse* featuring Grandpappy includes a suited Campbell on the cover. A newspaper biography of Campbell from 1937 stresses that the only resemblance between Grandpappy and Campbell is the voice. An undated newspaper clipping reports the death of Campbell's real-life father: Undated newspaper clippings, Archie Campbell scrapbook, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection, TAMIS; Undated songbook, *Archie Grandpappy's Gems of Songs as Heard on WROL's Country Playhouse*, WROL, Knoxville, Tennessee, c. 1950, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection; Undated newspaper clipping, 'Here It Is Folks: Story of Grandpappy, Popular WNOX Star', c. 1937, Archie Campbell scrapbook, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection; Undated newspaper clipping, 'Grandpappy's Dad Dies at Age 58', Box 1, Campbell Family Collection.
[172] *1937 Souvenir Picture Book: WHO Barn Dance Frolic* (Des Moines, Iowa: WHO, 1937), 7. Sarah Colley Cannon, who played Minnie Pearl, also became, in McCusker's analysis, a public persona in her own right: McCusker, *Lonesome Cowgirls and Honky Tonk Angels*, 119-120.

captioned ‘this is grandma … don’t say I told you, but she’s 28 years old.’[173] The jarring combination of Grandpa Jones and his young wife Ramona, however, echoed visually another phenomenon of the era: that of elderly Civil War veterans and their young, sometime underage wives, who married them for their widows’ pensions.[174]

To explain why promotional material was so proactively open about the theatricality of age masquerade, it is necessary to consider the broader fantasy of barn dance radio. Exaggerated hillbilly characters were as common as the fake stage sets depicting pastoral landscapes, and audiences embraced both as diversions from everyday life. Barn dance radio relied, Chad Berry argues, on the ‘experiences and nostalgic memories associated with a real barn dance, a widespread institution of communal sociability that many commentators of the time feared was passing from the scene.’[175] Yet, for all this escapism, many working-class, white, southern and midwestern listeners held mixed feelings towards this past. The pastoral tranquillity, community feeling, and old-time music and comedy certainly appealed, but the perceptions and memories of ignorance, poverty and backwardness did not. Laughing at the familiar derogatory stereotypes could only be done alongside public recognition of the imitation at hand. Minstrelsy scholar William J. Mahar claims that a comparable ‘reveal’ of race shielded white blackface entertainers from ‘any direct personal and psychological identification with the material they were performing.’[176] Pamela Fox interprets similar ‘reveals’ in hillbilly mimicry as opportunities to ‘reify, rather than actually “live”, class and racial Otherness by self-consciously performing it.’[177] Age masquerade fits well into these

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[173] *WNOX Picture Album: Archie ‘Grandpappy’ Campbell* (Knoxville, Tennessee: WNOX, 1947), 4.
[174] Concerns about this common practice across the nation were noted as early as 1898: ‘Pension Payments’, *Literary Digest*, 8 January 1898, 35.
[175] Berry, *The Hayloft Gang*, 33.
[176] William J. Mahar, *Behind the Burnt Cork Mask: Early Blackface Minstrelsy and Antebellum American Popular Culture* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 1.
[177] Fox, *Natural Acts*, 9. As Fox shows, class played a key role in the ‘hillbilly reveal’, and some old-timer acts were equally likely to stress their true non-working-class identities as well as their age. In a 'reveal' in a WHO songbook, readers are assured that Shari Morning and Gaylord McPherson, who played old-timer acts Tillie Boggs and Sheriff Quigely, were college-educated actors who had performed with classical string orchestras: *1937 Souvenir Picture Book: WHO Barn Dance Frolic*, 7.

interpretations: old-timer acts joked about and reified age otherness, but made the theatricality clear.

Confusingly, old-timer acts occasionally intermingled with genuinely old acts. Onstage with Granny Harper during a *Renfro Valley* broadcast in 1941, Aunt Idy calls the audience 'them young 'uns', thus identifying herself with her genuinely aged stage partner.[178] During a 1948 broadcast of the same show, John Lair clearly saw no issue while transitioning between Old Joe Clark and Harper, nor encouraging Harper ('let's go granny') with the same kind of comedic age-based language as he did Clark ('now where's … old man Joe?').[179] A live concert over WLW in Cincinnati in 1942 featured a bonanza of faux- and genuinely aged southerners, including Grandpa Jones, Grandpa Doolittle, and Ma and Pa McCormick.[180] The staged performance of age seemingly did not affect an audience's simultaneous appreciation of a real aged act. It did, however, affect some aged performers. *Opry* star Roy Acuff recalled that the first thing Uncle Dave did when he got on stage was to 'greet the audience and shake his goatee to "let 'em know that it was natural" - too many performers posing as older man, wearing a goatee with glue.'[181] This tantalising, if narrow insight into what old acts thought of age masquerade is significant: Macon was ambivalent about, or perhaps even threatened by age masquerade, and thought it necessary to 'authenticate' his own age to differentiate himself in an industry populated by artificially 'aged' acts.

[178] Radio transcription recording, 'Renfro Valley Barn Dance', 1 March 1941, WLW, Cincinnati, Ohio, Folder 5, Box 80, Series 9, John Lair Papers, BCSCA. Similarly, a photograph of Campbell's Grandpappy at a live Chattanooga concert for WDOD in 1938 shows him onstage with an old guest from the audience. Considering Grandpappy usually led the show's comedy, it is likely that the humour of the exchange came from him rather than the old guest: Photograph, Archie Campbell, Chattanooga, Tennessee, 1938, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection, TAMIS.
[179] Radio transcription recording, 'Renfro Valley Barn Dance', WHAS, Louisville, Kentucky, 27 November 1948, Folder 28, Box 90, Series 10, John Lair Papers, BCSCA.
[180] 'WLW Boone County Jamboree', *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 21 November 1942, 5.
[181] Roy Acuff, interview by Charles K. Wolfe, Sept 19, 1977, accession number 05-023, Charles K. Wolfe Collection, CPM.

Fan mail sent to stations and radio publications are also important, if potentially unrepresentative insights into audience responses to age masquerade. Listeners frequently wrote in asking for the actual ages and backgrounds of their favourite stars: readers from Kentucky, Georgia, Kansas and elsewhere wrote to *Rural Radio* magazine to request the real ages of acts such as Uncle Henry, Sarie and Sally, Pappy Cliff, and Uncle Ezra.[182] An anonymous fan of WROL's televised *Country Playhouse* show wrote a letter to Archie Campbell complimenting the show he listened to every morning in their home of Sevierville, Tennessee. They specifically addressed the letter to 'Grandpappa' rather than the station or Campbell. The listener also included some jokes which they hoped Campbell may include in his act, implying that they were aware that the Grandpappy character was not real, even though they held affection for the grandfatherly centrepiece to the show.[183] More nameless listeners from Knoxville and Johnson City, Tennessee had their letters published in a WNOX brochure, in which they wrote that 'Grandpappy gets better all the time. His quartet is fine', and that 'It's nice having Grandpappy back with the gang again', following Campbell's military tour of duty.[184] Audiences could also appreciate the theatricality of age masquerade alongside performances from genuinely old acts on radio. One listener from Laflin, Missouri had no issue praising both old-timer act Pappy Cheshire and real elderly performer Uncle Dave Macon in their same letter to *Rural Radio*.[185] What is less clear, though a fascinating question, is how *older* audiences reacted to these usually ageist depictions of their demographic, although two examples suggest younger people *believed* they might. Miss Alma Wormat of Weimer, Texas, wrote to *Rural Radio* to say how she, her father, and her grandmother 'listened to every one of Uncle Ezra's programs'. Bizarrely, old-time act Pappy Cheshire entertained at homes for the aged.[186]

[182] Revealing, readers also asked if Sarie and Sallie were married in real life: 'Family Gossip', *Rural Radio*, April 1938, 28; 'Family Gossip', *Rural Radio*, October 1938, 31.
[183] Fan letter to Archie Campbell, c. 1950, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection, TAMIS.
[184] *Midday Merry Go-Round* (Knoxville: WNOX, c. 1940s), 4.
[185] 'Radio Farm Digest', *Rural Radio*, January 1939, 24.
[186] 'Radio Farm Digest', *Rural Radio*, December 1938, 25.

In rare instances, audiences believed wholeheartedly that old-timer acts were old. During a WNOX publicity stunt in the late 1940s, Campbell's Grandpappy purposely got arrested for a minor misdemeanour, and a little old lady in the audience started hitting the arresting police officer with her umbrella, yelling 'Let him alone! He's an old man!'[187] Similarly, the white Malcolm Claire, who played Spareribs, an 'old darky' character on the *National Barn Dance* and children's shows, upset the mother of a listener when a photograph of him out of character was published in *Stand By!*. The mother wrote the magazine to describe how her daughter was shocked to discover Claire was Spareribs, and exclaimed to her parents 'No … Spare Ribs is an old man. He talks just like my grandpa.' Michael T. Bertrand argues that this episode demonstrates the blurring of the racial and the rural that could occur over radio.[188] Equally significant though, is how for the child the pretence of age was more shocking than that of race.

What makes the artificiality of age masquerade even stranger is how integral notions of authenticity have been to the genre of country music. The rhetoric of 'purity', 'honesty', 'truth', and what Pamela Fox describes 'rusticity', pervade the industry to this day. Old Joe Clark, who had pretended to be an old man for the great part of his youth, remarked, entirely without irony, that 'You cannot manufacture country music … It's got to come from the person himself.'[189] As this dissertation shows, such terminology was regularly applied to the genuinely old performers in old-time music. During a *Grand Ole Opry* broadcast, announcer George D. Hay can be heard, while segueing between Lonnie 'Pap' Wilson and an advertisement, sentimentalising the audience's reactions: 'It's not hard to imagine our own grandpappies dancing to these tunes.' Despite presumably most listeners knowing that Wilson was not old, Hay still used the performer to capitalise on the feelings listeners and

[187] Campbell and Byrd, *Archie Campbell: An Autobiography*, 56,58.
[188] 'Listener's Mike', *Stand By!*, 6 April 1935, 11; Michael T. Bertrand, 'Race and Rural Identity', in *The Hayloft Gang: The Story of the National Barn Dance*, ed. Chad Berry (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 143.
[189] Interview with Old Joe Clark, by John Rumble, 3 December 1985, Country Music Foundation Oral History Project, CMHFA.

audiences had towards their elders and an imagined past. Moreover, Hay did not come close to questioning why no grandparents were dancing to the tunes.[190] Indeed, Hay's comments signal the broader issue of this chapter: old-timer acts generally superseded genuinely old musicians on barn dance radio by the mid-1930s. Older performers were not as culturally prevalent or popular as their artificial counterparts. Considering that notions of authenticity were so central to the relatively minority appeal of real old musicians, one is left questioning why barn dance radio shifted towards inherently *inauthentic* old-timer acts.

Aside from larger cultural reasons discussed in this chapter, another explanation for this transition is that much of the humour surrounding old-timer acts was based on the juxtaposition between obvious signs of physical decay (glasses, walking sticks, and skits about ailments, etc.) and a surprising virility (excessive physicality and hypersexuality). As previous chapters show, although this humorous incongruity could be applied in descriptions of real elderly musicians, many struggled physically to perform at all, let alone with exaggerated bodily zeal. Physical debilitation and disability were inhibiting for many aged performers. Weak eyesight, hearing, or rheumatism, though substance of jokes for some, for genuinely old performers were medical, logistical, and perhaps sensitive issues. Older performers were more likely to struggle to perform with the humorously heightened physicality that made old-timers so appealing, or endure the gruelling shoe-string tours required of radio performers. Indeed, radio producers and record industry professionals with pragmatic, if macabre, outlooks, may have also recognised that a young act like Grandpa Jones had greater longevity, and therefore potential brand familiarity, than a real aged grandpa. With lower life expectancy and higher rates of disability and illness in the South and the rural Midwest than the rest of the country, the 'shelf-life' of a real aged southern performer was significantly lower than a reasonably healthy, young performer pretending to be old.

[190] Radio transcription recording, 'Grand Ole Opry - Prince Albert - Part 2', WSM, Nashville, Tennessee, 4 October 1941, CMHFA.

Conclusion

There are many reasons for the decline of age masquerade. The rise of youth-orientated, teen rock and roll and popular music markets in the mid-1950s may have made old-timer acts, and their depictions of simpler, older days, less appealing. The big stars of country music had always tended to be young, but their youthfulness became more central to their image in the postwar era of teen icons. Moreover, as Jeffery Lange argues, during the 1940s and 1950s, 'hillbilly' musicians, as they were referred to in the mainstream, as well as by some of those within the industry, increasingly turned away from the derogatory connotations of the label.[191] The Second World War and spread of country music radio into American homes 'nationalised' country music and increasingly deregionalised what was, overall, a southern musical style. The rube outfits of the 1920s and 1930s were gradually replaced with 'westernised' suits, slick hair and modern electric instrumentation of the 1950s. The institutionalisation of country music industry through the Country Music Association and other professional bodies centred around Nashville, refined old-time and hillbilly music into the more respectable 'country music', eventually giving birth to the more pop-orientated subgenre of the Nashville Sound. The image of elderly, old-fashioned hillbillies did not sit well with those wanting to modernise country music. In his autobiography, Archie Campbell described his own experiences with these broader tensions:

> I felt it was time to make a change, and I discarded old Grandpappy for good … Grandpappy had been good to me, but he had to go … Up until then, as far as I know, all country clowns had always appeared in some sort of costume. You know, the loose-fitting overalls or baggy pants of some kind of hick outfit … after I had been on the *Opry* a while and had gotten my feet under me, I decided I would just go out on the stage looking like a respectable person. So I bought a brand-new mohair suit with a white shirt and a tie and a nice pair of fashionable shoes … [My manager] stopped me and said, 'where's your costume?' … People come here to laugh at our jokes, but I think they want to respect us as well. I just don't believe they want to see a rube anymore.[192]

[191] Lange, *Smile When You Call Me a Hillbilly*, 240-52.
[192] Campbell and Byrd, *Archie Campbell: An Autobiography*, 103.

Ideas of social mobility, respectability, and dignity played a significant role in Campbell's decision. Yet despite his ambition, Campbell was still referred to as Grandpappy at an award ceremony in Athens, Tennessee in 1965, and fans continued to write letters to 'Grandpappy' until the 1980s.[193]

The shift away from age masquerade was neither instant, nor universal, but it is important to note the late 1950s as an important rough historical watershed. Barn dance themes and age masquerade occasionally translated to television and cinema. The most notable example is Grandpa Jones' long career on CBS's *Hee Haw*. Though Jones himself had reached middle age by the show's debut in 1969, he still played up the same character he had been performing since the 1930s. Old Joe Clark remained at *Renfro Valley Barn Dance* and its short-lived television and film experimentations through the 1960s and beyond. Harry Cheshire reused his Pappy Cheshire character from radio on western television shows and films. The comedy of age masquerade lived on in rural situational comedies on television in the 1950s and 1960s, though they tended to employ real old people.[194] On radio, some country music deejays who replaced barn dance programming inherited some of the agedness of old-timer acts. Uncle Tom over WNOX carried on dressing old as a deejay into the 1950s.[195] Deejay Eddie Hill introduced his WSM slot in

[193] Certificate, 'Certificate of award for Honorary citizen of City of Athens, Tennessee', Archie Campbell, 1965, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection, TAMIS; Letter from Mr J H. St. Clair to Archie Campbell, April 27, 1983, Box 3, Campbell Family Collection; Letter from Randy Hatcher to Archie Campbell, 1 December 1983, Box 3, Campbell Family Collection. It is difficult to know exactly when Campbell fully discarded the Grandpappy act. A photograph as late as 1958 shows him the outfit for a barn dance show: Photograph of Archie Campbell as Grandpappy, 1958, Box 1, Campbell Family Collection.

[194] Granny from the *Beverley Hillbillies*, Grandpa Amos McCoy from *The Real McCoys*, Fred and Doris Ziffel from *Green Acres*, and Cliff Arquette's Charles Weaver from *The Real McCoys* had several age-centred episodes.

[195] The media would report about the real young performer behind the radio voices of old-timer deejays, like Uncle Tom, just as they did for old-time musicians: Lindsey Nelson, 'Listeners Swear - By and At - Uncle Tom of WNOX, Who Graduated From News Editor to Disc Jockey', *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, 24 August 1947, 8.

1953 by saying 'This is your bald-headed, hand-spanked, corn-fed, gravy-sopping, naggle-toothed, cross-eyed old country boy'.[196]

A final irony of age masquerade on barn dance radio is how some performers maintained their acts well into their own old age. Ramona Jones, Grandpa's wife, recalled that eventually Grandpa did not need his fake grey moustache, as he had grown his own. Taylor, after dropping his 'Grandpappy Nerit' act, kept the moniker 'Pappy' well into his own grandfatherhood.[197] While reality and theatricality occasionally blurred, some acts retained a concrete distinction between their real and fake 'aged' selves. Archivist and researcher John Rumble recalled to the present author that while backstage at an *Opry* concert featuring Grandpa Jones, the then 80-year-old performer revealed that he was tired from the night's performance, and relieved to 'get out of this Grandpa outfit and get home'.[198]

[196] H.B. Teeter, 'Platters and Palaver', *Nashville Tennessean,* 25 January 1953; Craig Havighurst, *Air Castle of the South: WSM and the Making of Music City* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 178.
[197] After suffering a stroke, Jones went into hospital still wearing the wrinkle make-up that he continued to wear in his latter-day performances: Jones and McNeil, *Make Music While You Can*, 85-90; Loyal Jones, 'Death Comes in Threes', 23-29.
[198] John Rumble, personal correspondence with the author, September 2017.

Chapter Four

Getting Old Blues: Old Age Imaginaries on Old-Time and Race Records

I am old now, been taking care of you for forty years.
Since I've lost my health, you always giving me hell.[1]

Mississippi bluesman Johnnie Temple was one of several musicians between 1920 and 1945 who made either race or old-time records that depicted aged characters or ideas about old age that constitute 'old age imaginaries'.[2] Arguably, some of these portrayals of later life deal with transhistorical themes about ageing, but this chapter posits that others reflected some of the key demographic, social, political, economic, and medical changes of the time. With few exceptions, these records were performed and written by relatively 'young' artists, even the ones sung in the first person, meaning they are more indicative of contemporary perceptions rather than experiences of old age. Importantly, this chapter suggests that recording artists occasionally used age tropes in their lyrics to comment to upon other changes in modern life, especially regarding race relations, work environments, sexual mores, migration, family structures, and the welfare state. A few scholars have analysed depictions of old age in song, and this chapter builds on the shared premise that lyrics and music can provide an insight into contemporary ideas about old age. However, this chapter also expands on this literature by focusing on recorded, rather than printed, music in the interwar years, a period which saw record-buying go from being a niche hobby of well-off consumers to a national pastime, and which witnessed the birth and evolution of the old-time and race music genres.[3]

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[1] Johnnie Temple, 'Getting Old Blues' (Decca 7599, 1939).
[2] For 'old age imaginaries', see Chris Gilleard and Paul Higgs, 'Studying Dementia: The Relevance of the Fourth Age', *Quality in Ageing and Older Adults* 15, no. 4 (2014): 241-243.
[3] Some significant studies of depictions of old age in song include Elias S. Cohen and Anna L. Kruschwitz, 'Old Age in America Represented in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Popular Sheet Music', *The Gerontologist* 30, no. 3 (June 1, 1990): 345-54; Ronald Aday and Benjaman S. Austin, 'Images of Aging in the Lyrics of American Country Music',

Several methodological and conceptual obstacles arise when collating and assessing a thematic set of recorded music. Discographies help source titles relating to old age amongst thousands of old-time and race records, but they do not always reveal old age themes. When discographic information is available, it is difficult to source rarer records. Some songs will never be heard as labels often rejected recordings or left them unissued. It is useful to know, for example, that in 1931 Mississippi bluesman Willie Brown wrote, performed, and recorded 'Grandma Blues' (Paramount 13001) but as no surviving copy of the record has ever been found, it is difficult to assess how the song depicted old age. However, the guiding principle here is that the fact that an artist wrote, performed and recorded a song about old age is still indicative of wider trends. The vocabulary associated with old age can also cause confusion as a result of certain southern vernacular linguistic traits. The frequent use of 'old' as a term of familiarity or affection in the South means it is unclear whether, for example, Robert Wilkins in 'Old Jim Canan's' (Vocalion unissued) from 1935 is singing about a bar owned by an elderly man, or just a well-frequented drinking hole. Similarly, it is debateable whether some of the songs that refer to 'Pappy' or 'Ma' are indicative of romantic or familial relations. In summary, this compilation of 'old age songs', like the genre-based discographies that provided the foundations for this research, will always be susceptible to dispute and additions. Indeed, for the sake of

Educational Gerontology 26, no. 2 (2000): 135-154; Howard P. Chudacoff, *How Old Are You?: Age Consciousness in American Culture* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992, 138-156. A notable very recent addition to this literature is a survey of country music candidates and pensions in Peter La Chapelle, *I'd Fight the World: A Political History of Old-Time, Hillbilly, and Country Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 100-111. The generally accepted, if simplistic, chronology of old-time music, beginning with Fiddlin' John Carson's recording of 'Little Log Cabin In The Lane' in 1923, has already been discussed. The equivalent 'birth' of commercial blues music begins with the success of Mamie Smith's 'Crazy Blues' (OKeh 4169) in 1920. Both these genres respectively morphed into different labels, R&B and country music, by the end of the Second World War. Many race recordings and jazz recordings by both white and black acts, however, were made in the 1910s.

concision, this chapter ignores *un*recorded vernacular or 'folk' songs concerning old age themes that existed only within oral traditions.[4]

Most of these songs were written or performed by southerners, by members of the southern diaspora, or by non-southerners in a 'southern style' or with reference to the South. These distinctions of geography and identity are important but do not necessarily compromise the basic thrust of the chapter: that these records reflected a broad spectrum of understandings of a 'southern old age'. Similarly, many of these records were new songs that mirrored both the longer-term historical contexts of early twentieth century and specificities of the moments they were recorded. Other songs were originally written in the mid-to-late nineteenth century and came with a lot of historical baggage when waxed by race and old-time artists. This occasionally raises doubts as to how much these records reflected social attitudes of the twentieth rather than nineteenth century. For example, the Floyd County Ramblers may have recorded the song 'Granny Will Your Dog Bite' (Victor 23759) because its depiction of old age had a unique historical relevance for them or their listeners when they recorded in 1930, or because the song had been played and appreciated in the South since before the Civil War. The underlying argument of this chapter is that the recording of a song about old age, whether written recently or decades before, suggests its portrayal of old age was meaningful or lucrative for artists, producers, and consumers in the period discussed here.

[4] A good summary of these methodological challenges are dealt with in Minton, *78 Blues*, 11-34. Discographies consulted here include Tony Russell, *Country Music Records* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). Robert M. W. Dixon, John Godrich, and Howard W. Rye, *Blues and Gospel Records: 1890-1943*, Fourth Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). The Discography of American Historical Recordings, based at the University of California, Santa Barbara, has also been an invaluable digital resource: available at https://adp.library.ucsb.edu, accessed 3 June 2019.

Old Age On Wax

It is important first to determine whether, and to what degree, old age songs on race and old-time records were 'popular'. Fewer old-time or race artists made records about grandmas than about girlfriends, God, or war. Nevertheless, the approximately 150 race and old-time records referenced here suggest old age was a relatively commonplace subject. There was a special relationship between old-time music and the old age theme. Race records about old age constitute less than a third of the songs discussed here. By contrast, some old-time records about old age were breakthrough, bestselling, and 'crossover' popular hits. The success of one song sung from the perspective of an old man, Fiddlin' John Carson's 1923 'Little Old Log Cabin In The Lane', helped inspire the formation of the old-time music genre. Another about an elderly father, Gene Autry's 1931 hit 'That Silver Haired Daddy of Mine' (Victor 23627), was one of the most popular releases of any genre in the 1930s. In the same year Social Security was signed into law, 'Old Folks At Home' became the state song of Florida.

Record labels went to significant efforts to produce and market old age songs. More than once labels released records with a song about old age on both the A- and B-sides.[5] Several songs discussed in this chapter were rerecorded by numerous artists, indicating industry professionals felt they had long-lasting marketability. Sometimes several old age songs, if not finally released in the same package, were waxed during an artist's single session in the studio.[6] Labels occasionally added a touch of agedness to their marketing of

[5] A selection of records with songs about old age on both the A and B side include: Chubby Parker, 'That Old Wooden Rocker'/'Grandfather's Clock' (Champion 16163, 1930); Chubby Parker, 'That Old Wooden Rocker/Get Away Old Maids Get Away' (Montgomery Ward 4945, 1930); Jack Teter, When You And I Were Young, Maggie'/ 'Silver Threads Among The Gold' (Paramount 325, 1929); Frank Luther and Carson Robinson, 'That Silver Haired Daddy Of Mine'/'Ma And Pa' (Melotone M12371, 1932); Pine Ridge Ramblers, 'When Winter Weaves Its Silver In Our Hair'/'Parents I Left Alone' (Bluebird B-7818, 1934); Zora Layman, 'Great Grandma'/'Granny's Old Armchair' (Decca 12022, 1934). In 1936 the Brown Brothers depicted a cross-generational conversation across two songs on record: 'My Mother And Dear Old Dad'/'Son, Please Come Home' (Bluebird B-6623).
[6] Some 'old age sessions' include: Fiddlin' John Carson, 'Pa's Birthday' (OKeh 45440) and 'Who Bit The Wart of Grandma's Nose' (OKeh 45448), recorded at a 1929 session in New

recording artists who were not old, but nevertheless recorded songs about old age. Ernest Stoneman's 1927 record about an old vagrant, 'The Poor Tramp Has To Live' (Gennett 6044) was re-released under two 'old'-sounding pseudonyms for two different labels: Uncle Jimmy Seaney (Champion 15233), and Uncle Ben Hawkins (Silvertone 9255).

Both race and old-time artists referred to old age imaginaries in their in-studio performances. During a guitar solo in his unissued 1930 recording of 'Grandma's Farm' for Gennett, blues artist Big Bill Broonzy encourages the guitarist (possibly himself) to solo by insisting they 'play it for Grandma'. In 'Bring It Home To Grandma' (Decca 7064) from 1935, a male member of Richard M. Jones' Jazz Wizards interjects the titular chorus with an impersonation of a grandmotherly voice. Before the music begins in the old-time trio Taylor, Moore & Burnett's 1928 record 'Grandma's Rag' (Gennett 6706), a male musician, echoing the practice of age masquerade, pretends to be a grandmother. Records with titles that conjured images of old characters likely changed how one listened to the music on these records. On 'Old Fiddler Joe' (Bluebird B-8395) from 1940, Johnny Barfield sings about the titular character awaiting his death in a mountain cabin with only his fiddle to pass the time. The young fiddler Ralph Pleasant's playing is prominent in the mix making the listener believe they are hearing the aged Joe.

Some records about old age were natural fits for old-time catalogues. Benny Borg's 1927 pairing of 'I Want A Pardon For Daddy'/'Are You Going To Leave The Old Home Jim' (15148-D), for example, suited Columbia's 'Familiar Tunes - Old and New' series. Several old-time acts featured the word 'old' in their group name (including the Old Fashioned Boys, Old Henry's Musicians, the Old Settlers, Old Sexton, the Old Smoky Twins, the Old Time Dance Orchestra, and the Oldtimers, amongst others). Over two hundred old-time titles begin with the word 'old' (let alone the hundreds more with the word

Orleans; Clarence Harding, 'Great Grandad' (Gennett rejected) and 'Granny's Armchair' (Gennett Rejected) in Richmond, Indiana in 1933.

elsewhere in the title).[7] An equally vast number of old-time records were made of centuries-old songs. If it is unsurprising that a sense of 'old times' was central to the old-time genre, it is less recognised that old age imaginaries were used to market such records. A 1924 Victor brochure for its 'Olde Time Fiddlin' Tunes' series shows a barn dance, which Jeff Todd Titon argues shows rosy-cheeked 'healthy-looking people' as 'pure products of the natural environments which produced hillbilly music'.[8] There is some truth to this analysis, yet it is striking that the fiddler in the illustration has notably whiter hair than the young dancers he is playing for. A similar cover for a 1926 Victor brochure entitled *Old Time Melodies of the Sunny South* depicts a pastoral cabin scene in which an elderly fiddler with bushy white moustache plays for the entertainment of a young couple.[9] Images of old people indicated that the music being sold was 'old-time'.

Old age imaginaries were nearly omnipresent on barn dance radio. In 1925, the *Nashville Tennessean* reported on the experimentation with old-time music at WSM: 'People who danced to the music of old-time fiddlers a generation ago now tune in [to the station]'.[10] In 1935, *Stand By!* magazine, an associated publication of the *National Barn Dance*, published extensive, if naive elegies about the aged and their valued place in US society.[11]

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[7] Tony Russell, *Country Music Records*, 668-69. The appendage of 'old' to band names, like regional signifiers, was rarely related to the age of the performers: the Old Southern Sacred Singers, for example, were a young studio quartet featuring the young New York session singer Vernon Dalhart. This was not merely a southern phenomenon, as the existence of the Old Quebec Trio suggests.

[8] 'Copy of Victor Talking Machine Company Catalog,' Southern Folklife Collection Discographical Files, Southern Folklife Collection, Wilson Library Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, available at https://exhibits.lib.unc.edu/exhibits/show/hillbilly_music/item/2841, accessed 9 September 2019; Jeff Todd Titon, *Early Downhome Blues: A Musical and Cultural Analysis*, Second Edition (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 238.

[9] Brochure, *Old Time Melodies of the Sunny South* (Camden, New Jersey: Victor Talking Machine Co., October 1926)

[10] 'Players of Old-Time Favorites for WSM', *Nashville Tennessean*, 20 December 1925, 58.

[11] *Stand By!* reported that 'Old age is a wonderful period, and let's call it the sunny side of life. We don't like that word old. We know many, many elderly folks who are scattering a lot of sunshine and good advice to a lot of younger folks. We respect those folks enjoying the autumn of life. May they never grow older in spirit': 'Check' Stafford, 'The Latch Spring', *Stand By!*, 13 July 1935, 8. A similar editorial was printed two months later: 'Check' Stafford, 'The Latch Spring', *Stand By!*, 21 September 1935, 8.

However, no producer portrayed old age imaginaries over radio more than producer John Lair, who dedicated an entire show to songs about grey-haired mothers with spoken interludes valuing elderly mothers before they passed away.[12] During one episode for a barn dance show for the Olson Rug Company in Chicago, Lair implored listeners to surprise their 'dear old mothers' on mother's day with a velvet Olson rug before moving onto a performance from his musical guests of 'I Wonder How The Old Folks Are At Home'.[13] On radio then, the invocation of imagined elders, as with having musicians who were aged or masquerading as old, was tied to its fundamental commercial function. Lair's gendered invocation of the fictional old *mother*, like his booking of Granny Harper and Aunt Idy onto his barn dance programmes, created a homely atmosphere of aged (and old-fashioned) femininity that neatly tied in with his ulterior motive to sell domestic products, such as an Olson rug, to the show's female listeners.

Some records about old age were tied to age-related products. Records like Wade Mainer's unimaginatively titled 'Commercial - Old Sams Soda [sic]' (Bluebird unissued) from 1936 and Skyland Scotty's 1934 'Aunt Jemima's Plaster' (Conqueror 8308) were tie-in products for brands with elderly mascots. These records fed into a wider use of age-themed songs to hawk anti-ageing products and patent medicines over radio. The quack 'doctor' John R. Brinkley advertised his 'rejuvenating' goat-gland remedies and operations over XER, a radio station in Villa Acuña, Coahuila, over the US-Mexican border by using old-time music and musical old age imaginaries. Thousands of aged and middle-aged men and women across the rural South and Midwest listened in Brinkley's broadcasts to hear both old-time music and medical advice.[14] Old-time artists like the Carter Family performed

[12] Script, 'Aladdin Barn Dance Frolic', 31 October 1931, Folder 2, Box 31, Series 6, John Lair Papers, BCSCA.
[13] Script, 'Olson Rug Company', WLS, Chicago, Illinois, 18 April 1931, Folder 6, Box 31, Series 6, John Lair Papers, BCSCA.
[14] Known as the 'goat-gland man' for his unique 'cure' for impotence and ageing, Brinkley thrived in in what Gene Fowler and Bill Crawford call the 'age of rejuvenation'. Brinkley once told his listeners 'you're only as old as your glands': Gene Fowler and Bill Crawford, *Border Radio: Quacks, Yodelers, Pitchmen, Psychics, and Other Amazing Broadcasters of*

some old age songs over XER such as 'The Old Ladies' Home', I Wonder How The Old Folks Are At Home', 'My Clinch Mountain Home', and 'Darling We Are Growing Older'. These songs collectively sustained an old age imaginary over the airwaves that encouraged listeners to reflect upon their own ageing, thereby potentially making them more susceptible to advertisements for youth elixirs and medicines.[15] The Carter Family also performed such songs over Peruna-sponsored programming, the same company that hired Grandpa Jones to entertain in-between their on-air advertisements for their 'cure-all' tonic for rheumatism and colds. Crazy Waters Crystals, based in Mineral Wells, Texas sponsored barn dance programming over WBT in Charlotte, North Carolina. Local act J. E. Mainer's Mountaineers played between Crazy Crystal advertisements on WBT in the 1930s, and probably performed their record 'Don't Cause Mother's Hair To Turn Grey' (Bluebird B-6324).[16] During radio announcements, Crazy Waters representatives would read out what they claimed were 'unsolicited letters' from older consumers who praised the power of the product to beat 'sluggish systems', and in one advertisement told listeners 'you are as young as you feel. At five minutes past forty when the clock of life begins to run down … its time to stop, look and listen to warnings nature's been constantly giving for the past many years.'[17]

As well as radio, old age imaginaries featured in the earliest appearances of old-time musicians on the big screen. In 1929, Columbia Pictures and Victor Records co-released *The*

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the American Airwaves, Revised Edition (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 18; R. Alton Lee, *The Bizarre Careers of John R. Brinkley* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2015).

[15] This particular use of old age imaginaries was probably more common on border radio, as it was free from the regulation of the National Radio Commission, who had closed down Brinkley's previous station in Kansas. For the Carter Family's time on XER, see Mark Zwonitzer and Charles Hirshberg, *Will You Miss Me When I'm Gone?: The Carter Family and Their Legacy in American Music* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014), 209-233.

[16] Pamela Grundy, '"We Always Tried to Be Good People": Respectability, Crazy Water Crystals, and Hillbilly Music on the Air, 1933-1935', *Journal of American History* 81, no. 4 (1995): 1591-1620.

[17] Radio transcription recording, 'Crazy Water Crystal Commercials. All American Radio Program Sellers, Dallas, Tex.', Transcription Disc TR-20360/992, Ed Kahn Collection, Southern Folklife Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Singing Brakeman, one of the first sound movies, to national acclaim.[18] In the film, the 30-year-old star of old-time music, Jimmie Rodgers, performs three songs with his guitar while waiting on a railway platform, his only 'audience' being a female proprietor of the station's eating house and an old woman knitting in a rocking chair on the platform. For much of the film the latter figure remains in shot and requests Rodgers to play her 'favourite song', 'Waiting For A Train'. She sighs with pleasure after he finishes, remarking croakily 'Gee, I do love that old song, Jimmie.' Her presence and brief speaking part legitimise Rogers' song as 'old', even though he had only recorded it a year earlier. Although appreciative, the old woman is a decisively passive listener during the performance, looking down at her knitting for the entire song, giving the impression that the event is less a commercial 'performance' and more an informal 'family' affair. This old-timey feel was expressed sonically too. The urbane, jazzy elements of the original recording, such as the clarinet solo, are missing from the filmed performance, leaving only the 'rootsy' combination of voice and guitar. It is difficult to decipher who scripted the film, let alone the part of the old woman, but whoever was responsible, the movie solidified for cinematic audiences the notion that even the relatively young Rodgers could still be considered an authentic 'old-time' artist because an old woman enjoyed his playing.[19]

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[18] Jasper Ewing Brady, dir., *The Singing Brakeman* (Columbia Pictures, 1929). One Rodgers biographer argues Rodgers' film was the 'best selling short of its time', but Nolan Porterfield finds little evidence to support this claim, suggesting instead that it was played across the country but did not receive much press attention: Nolan Porterfield, *Jimmie Rodgers: The Life and Times of America's Blue Yodeler* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), 261. Barry Mazor, summarising these different assessments, argues that the decision to distribute a second, almost identical version in 1930 indicates that a sufficiently high demand for the film must have existed to warrant the use of an alternative take as a source for new prints: Barry Mazor, *Meeting Jimmie Rodgers: How America's Original Roots Music Hero Changed the Pop Sounds of a Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 94.

[19] The 1929 version was directed by Colonel Jasper Ewing Brady, a military veteran born in 1866 who had turned his attention to cinema in later life. That the director was elderly does not necessarily mean he was the source of the uncredited elderly woman character but provides one explanation aside from those listed here. Another likely influence was Ralph Peer, the A&R man who 'discovered' and managed Rodgers until his death in 1933. It was Peer who secured the film contract, and others that never came to fruition: Nolan Porterfield, *Jimmie Rodgers*, 160-63.

Significantly, the marketing of African American 'race' artists also featured old age imaginaries, if less frequently. The cartoon illustrations used to advertise Paramount's race series provide a useful case study. Depictions of aged characters in these advertisements often were unrelated to the records they were advertising. A promotional flyer for Buddie Boy Hawkins' 1927 record 'Snatch It Back Blues' (Paramount 12475) features a drawing of a balding, white-haired black man reading a newspaper while leaning on a railway line, even though the image had nothing to do with the song's lyrics.[20] As Jeff Todd Titon argues, many of the white illustrators and marketing personnel at record labels drew on a long tradition of highly racialised images as inspiration for their race series advertisements, not least derogatorily idiotic characterisations of elderly blacks akin to Uncle Tom and Uncle Remus.[21] In other cases, drawings of elderly characters on record advertisements added specific meanings to a song's lyric. In a flyer for Ramblin' Thomas' 1928 release 'No Job Blues' (Paramount 12609), a drawing of a black man in chains plainly reflected the down-and-out protagonist of the lyrics to the song, who is imprisoned for vagrancy. That the character was bald and wrinkled, however, suggested that the protagonist was *aged* despite the song's lyrics providing no indication of his age [Appendix 4.1]. The albeit small number of consumers who both saw the advertisement and heard the record may have well have understood that the hard times faced by the jobless character were compounded by his advanced age.[22] However, the most common use of old age imaginaries in Paramount's race record marketing was for its religious releases, which regularly depicted bald or grey-haired preachers. In one advertisement, the copy tells prospective buyers that the songs were made from 'melodies that never will die', much like, presumably, the elderly pastor in the

[20] Promotional flyer created by Paramount for local use by its dealer network, May 1927, reprinted in liner notes to Various Artists, *The Rise and Fall of Paramount Records: 1917-1932*, (Third Man Records TMR203, 2014) compact disc.
[21] Titon, *Early Downhome Blues*, 218-25.
[22] Promotional flyer for local use by Paramount's dealer network, c. 1928, reprinted in liner notes to *The Rise and Fall of Paramount Records*.

accompanying sketch.[23] More existentially, a 1929 illustration advertising the Norfolk Jubilee Quartette's 'I'm Going Through' (Paramount 12749-A), a song concerning passage to the afterlife, shows a balding old black man hobbling with his cane towards Jesus Christ and a heavenly scene [Appendix 4.2].[24] Old age imaginaries then were prominent features of both the old-time and race genres, if in occasionally distinct ways.

Old and Feeble

Histories of country music typically cite the release of Fiddlin' John Carson's 'Little Old Log Cabin In The Lane' by OKeh in 1923 as a formative moment for the old-time genre. If the record had several precedents, the record at least marked an historical juncture in the marketing of white southern vernacular musicians by rousing music industry awareness of the commercial viability of rural-orientated music.[25] One year after the recording, OKeh advertised Carson's records to prospective distributors as 'the very first of their kind ever offered' and popular in 'territories which ordinarily are supposed to have no market for Fiddlin' records'.[26] Although much has been written about Carson and the circumstances surrounding the recording, less attention has been given to the representation of old age in his or other versions of the song.[27]

First published by Kentuckian newspaper editor and songwriter William Shakespeare Hays in 1871, 'Log Cabin' is sung from the perspective of an unnamed elderly

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[23] Promotional flyer created by Paramount for local use by its dealer network, April 1927, reprinted in liner notes to *The Rise and Fall of Paramount Records: 1917-1932*. A similar sketch of an elderly pastor can be seen in another Paramount advertisement from that year: 'Appealing Spirituals', *Chicago Defender*, 4 June 1927, reprinted in liner notes to *The Rise and Fall of Paramount Records*.

[24] 'I'm Going Through', *Chicago Defender*, 1 June 1929, reprinted in liner notes to *The Rise and Fall of Paramount Records*.

[25] For a notable challenge to the idea that Carson's recording was a 'formative' moment, see Jacques Vest, 'Polk Miller's Old South Quartette', *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 120, no. 2 (1 April 2012): 144-176.

[26] 'Fiddling John Carson', *Talking Machine World* 20, 15 September 1924, 58-59.

[27] As Carson himself got older, the significance of old age in the tune intensified. Carson was 55 years old when he first recorded the song in 1923, and 66 years old when he rerecorded it in 1934, its original title changed to its opening lyrics 'I'm Old And Feeble' (Bluebird 5959) and backed by another song about old age (a re-recording of 'Old And In The Way').

ex-slave lamenting that he is 'old and feeble and cannot work no more'. The protagonist's ageing body is mirrored by the decay of his material world: an old slave cabin with a fallen chimney, caved-in roof, and crumbling fences, a nearby dried-up pond, and a rusty-bladed hoe.[28] This imagery was replicated in the visual media surrounding the song: drawings of a grey-haired black man near his cabin graced both sheet music covers and 'magic lantern' slides that were screened in theatres alongside live performances of the song.[29] As well as bodily decline, the song presents old age, at least for an ex-slave, as a stage of life characterised by loneliness and nostalgia. The protagonist mourns the loss of his masters and old companions. As Patrick Huber argues, the song reflected the racial politics of Reconstruction, namely the fantasies of southern whites that ex-slaves longed for the 'securities' of slavery days.[30] Bill C. Malone argues that Hays' songs 'took root in the public consciousness and exerted influences in unexpected ways and for periods of time long past the life of their creator', and this was certainly true of his vision of a black old age in 'Log Cabin'.[31] By the turn of the century, 'Log Cabin' had become a 'stock song' that was available and familiar across the racial divide, and was recorded at least eight times before

[28] Hays composed over 350 songs, many of which were recorded by old-time artists, and wrote several 'sequels' to 'Log Cabin' including 'The Little Log Cabin's The Home After All' (1875), 'The Cabin On The Hill' (1878), 'De Ole Log Cabin' (1887), 'De Cabin in De Lane (Dem Good Old Days)' (n.d.), 'Little Old Log Cabin in de Woods' (n.d.). Hays penned similarly themed songs about home and old age, such as 'My Southern Sunny Home' (1864) and 'The White Cap My Grandmother Wore' (1897): Bill C. Malone, *Singing Cowboys and Musical Mountaineers: Southern Culture and the Roots of Country Music* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003), 62-63.

[29] Will S. Hays, *Little Old Log Cabin In The Lane* (New York: J.L. Peters, 1871). Magic lantern slides were projected illustrations that accompanied the live performance of a song: Riley Brothers, 'The Little Old Log Cabin', magic lantern, six slides, 1896, Lucerna Magic Lantern Web Resource, available at http://lucerna.exeter.ac.uk/set/index.php?language=EN&id=3001158, accessed 10 January 2019; Bamforth & Co., 'The Little Log Cabin', magic lantern, six slides, 1903, Lucerna Magic Lantern Web Resource, available at http://lucerna.exeter.ac.uk/set/index.php?language=EN&id=3002410, accessed 10 January 2019.

[30] Patrick Huber, *Linthead Stomp: The Creation of Country Music in the Piedmont South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 88-91.

[31] Malone, *Singing Cowboys and Musical Mountaineers*, 62-63.

Carson's 1923 rendition.[32] The title crossed into real-world usage, with journalists comparing real-life elderly ex-slaves to the character of the song.[33] The song title was even used as a measure of time, as in the 'days of the … "The Little Old Log Cabin in the Lane".'[34]

The ageing narrator, the country cabin, and other decaying objects of traditional rural southern life, all personified and captured a host of racial and socioeconomic transformations in the South in the early 1920s. While Fiddlin' John Carson shed the black dialect and characterisations for his rendition, he notably retained the line about 'masters and mistresses', which other old-time artists in later versions switched to 'parents'. The song's depictions of a contented elderly ex-slave, if coming from a 'white' voice, potentially suited the politics of an artist who occasionally performed at Ku Klux Klan-sponsored fiddle contests, but also the sentiments of the portion of his white audience base who desired a return to the racial hierarchies of the South prior to Emancipation.[35] This same audience had other reasons to appreciate the song's age/decline theme. Carson was also accustomed to performing for white mill workers around Atlanta, many of whom held strong agrarian roots

[32] These include: Columbia Minstrels, 'The Old Log Cabin in the Lane' (Columbia 645, 1902); Silas Leachman, 'Old Log Cabin in the Lane' (Victor 1893), 1903; 'Frank C. Stanley, A Little Old Log Cabin in the Lane' (Imperial 44823) c. 1906; Alma Gluck, 'The Little Old Cabin In The Lane' (Victrola 651-B, 1918); Metropolitan Quartet, 'The Little Old Log Cabin in the Lane' (Edison 6195, 1918); Bentley Ball, 'De Little Old Log Cabin In De Lane' (Columbia A3087, 1920); Oscar Seagle, 'Little Old Log Cabin in the Lane' (Columbia A-3582, 1922). The folklorist Frank C. Brown also came across vernacular versions of the song while collecting in North Carolina in the early 1920s: Newman Ivey White and Jan Philip Schinhan, eds., *The Frank C. Brown Collection of North Carolina Folklore: Vol. V: The Music of the Folk Songs* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1962), 439.
[33] In 1898, an Austin newspaper referred to the song in reference of William 'Grandpap' Shopshire, a 100-year-old ex-slave from Donerail, Kentucky who was in search of an 'honest lawyer' to help reclaim his property from the Kentucky courts: 'Looking For Honest Lawyer', *Austin American-Statesman* [TX], 5 March 1898, 4. A writer from the *Florence Herald* in 1901 expressed their hope that the 84-year-old ex-slave 'Uncle' Eph Cannon in Florence, Alabama, man would find an 'old woman' to take back to his 'little old log cabin in de lane': 'A Pen Sketch of "Uncle Eph"', *Florence Herald* [AL], 30 May 1901, 6.
[34] 'Peacock Valley Mines', *Galena Evening Times* [Kansas], 31 March 1900, 19.
[35] As Huber shows, Carson's politics and racial beliefs were complex, and complicated by commercial interests: he once, for example, performed for an integrated event featuring black communists: Huber, *Linthead Stomp*, 92. Other old-time artists performed similar songs about elderly ex-slaves, such as the Foreman Family's 'Poor Old Slave' (Victor V-40165, 1929).

and were troubled by the modern trials of urban industrial life, and therefore potentially invested emotionally in the song's generic imagery of the 'decline' of rural life and the elderly protagonist. While 'Log Cabin' gives an overall negative picture of old age, there is some positivity in the final stanzas when the narrator sings 'Ain't got long to stay here but what little time I've got / I'll try and rest contented while remain.' The caved-in roof of the cabin helps the character to see 'there's angels watching over' while he sleeps. Despite the downsides of old age, the old character finds contentment through religious faith and a resignation to fate, tropes whites historically associated with slaves. More generally, these final optimistic lines hinted at a resilience of spirit, in spite of material changes or the passing of time, that also lay at the core of both the Lost Cause ideology and southern agrarianism.[36]

Most recordings of 'Log Cabin' were made by white artists, some in 'black' dialect. However, a few black singers also recorded versions. Clarence Carroll Clark was an African American recording artist from Indiana who waxed several 'plantation' songs in early twentieth century including 'De Little Old Log Cabin In De Lane' (Columbia A-696) in 1909. The song was Clark's biggest hit. He regularly performed it in concert, rerecorded the song in 1917, and had the record reissued several times in the 1920s. If Clark publicly remained associated with the song, he personally began to gravitate away from it. In the early 1920s Clark openly commented on feeling trapped by the racial limitations of the Columbia label, including being told early in his career that he would only get his photograph published (a vital career step for early phonograph artists) if he recorded 'plantation' and 'coon' songs.' Frustrated by these restrictions, Clark stopped recording for Columbia in the early 1920s, and began recording 'high art' songs and spirituals for the

[36] Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1983), 7-16.

recently established and black-owned label Black Swan, where he was compared favourably to Caruso in promotional materials and finally had his photograph published.[37]

It is plausible that Clark had conflicting feelings about the popularity of 'Log Cabin', which he sang from the perspective of a poor aged ex-slave who longed *for* the Old South. After all, whites frequently performed the song for laughs on the minstrel stage and on record. The milieu of Harlem Renaissance intellectuals surrounding both Clark and Black Swan may have directly or indirectly influenced his decision to abandon the song due to its protagonist being a doppelganger for other equally deprecating aged black characterisations, such as Uncle Tom and Uncle Remus. In an interview with Clark at a session for Black Swan, the *Chicago Defender* lauded him as a 'credit to the race', but, significantly, also made special effort to comment on his relative youth, noting that he and everyone in the studio were in their thirties or younger. Reviewing Clark's performance of 'Swing Low, Sweet Chariot', the *Defender* delicately situated Clark within a historical lineage of black resistance, while simultaneously asserting his youth and generational distance from the legacies of slavery: 'three generations removed from slavery, there crept into his voice more than a hint of the longing for escape from suffering which must have inspired the original to a poignant degree.' [38] Although recorded spirituals held their own racialised appeal for white consumers, by switching 'Log Cabin' for a spiritual, and swapping the voice of an old ex-slave for a young man, Clark in his own way presaged the burgeoning activities of the 'New Negro'.[39]

There are parallels here to the history of 'Ol' Man River', written by Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein II for Paul Robeson to perform as 'Joe' in the Broadway musical *Showboat* in the late 1920s. While Todd R. Decker's thorough history of the song focuses on

[37] Tim Brooks, *Lost Sounds: Blacks and the Birth of the Recording Industry, 1890-1919* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 151-172.
[38] 'Black Swan Records', *Chicago Defender*, 7 May 1921, 8.
[39] For the popularity of 'negro spirituals' with white audiences since the Civil War, see Sandra Jean Graham, *Spirituals and the Birth of a Black Entertainment Industry* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2018).

the sheer popularity of the tune, and the ways Robeson and others navigated around the racist imagery in the lyrics, more can be said of how old age figured into the iconic song, which, after all, personifies the Mississippi River as an *old* man. In the musical, the side character 'Joe', a dockworker and one-man 'Greek chorus' for the drama, extols the river for its longevity and perseverance, and wishes that he too might ascend to a virtuous and tranquil old age, unbothered by the (racial) troubles of the world. The song is repeated at the end of the show with Joe himself as an elderly man. Jules Bledsoe, the first to play the role of 'Joe' in 1927, wore old-age makeup for the part, making the lyric 'I'm tired of living and scared of dying' all the more poignant. Famously, Robeson initially refused to sing the song, or appear in the show. As Decker has shown, when Robeson finally appeared in the film version in 1936, he did not act as an old man. When Robeson sang the song live he changed the lyrics to 'That's the old man I *don't* like to be'. Like Clark, Robeson was reluctant to perform the song because of its general racial connotations. However, the agedness of the character also added a sense of passivity and resignation that only compounded the problematic racial dimensions of the song.[40]

If some black artists felt uncomfortable singing songs about docile elderly blacks, such material nevertheless continued to be recorded by whites and blacks alike. The Stephen Foster song 'Old Black Joe', a song about an old slave nearing the end of his life, was recorded by several race and old-time artists, including, ironically, Robeson himself in 1930 ('Poor Old Joe', HMV B.3664).[41] Similarly, the black septuagenarian banjoist Uncle John

[40] For the political meanings behind Robeson's revisions of the lyrics to 'Ol' Man River', see Todd R. Decker, *Who Should Sing Ol' Man River?: The Lives of an American Song* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Todd R. Decker, *Show Boat: Performing Race in an American Musical* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013). The aged characterisation in 'Old Man River' was parodied countless times over the next century, not least in versions by black artists. In 'Old Man Harlem' (Victor BS-75284, 1933), the Four Southern Singers sing of the headaches they receive from nightlife in the black New York neighbourhood, claiming the heady city lifestyle 'makes you old and grey'.

[41] For example, 'Old Black Joe' was recorded by the Fisk Jubilees Singers in 1909 (Victor 35097) and old-time act Riley Puckett (Columbia 15005) in 1924. In 1926, Fleischer Studio produced *Old Black Joe*, a cartoon based on the song that featured animated figures illustrating the song's narrative: Christopher P. Lehman, *The Colored Cartoon: Black*

Scruggs from Buckingham County, Virginia performed 'Log Cabin' for a Fox Movietone News reel played as a prelude to feature films. In the film, Scruggs sings in front of some dancing children, who might have been his real (grand)children, and farmyard animals outside a dilapidated cabin.[42] The short picture, which banjo scholar Chris Durman describes as a 're-enactment' of the song, indicates that tunes about elderly ex-slaves continued to entertain American audiences, and that some southern blacks from rural, working-class backgrounds continued to perform them, even while more upper-class African-American recording artists like Roberson and Clark were gradually turning away from them as an act of racial 'uplift'.[43]

Old And Only In The Way

Another theme of 'Log Cabin' is that the frail narrator cannot work due to his old age, and the record was one of several that articulated concerns about the relationship between ageing and work in the increasingly urbanised and industrialised South. 'Old And Only In The Way', first recorded by Carson in 1924 (OKeh 40181), and later by other old-time artists, describes the common sight of a penniless, homeless and abandoned old man whose 'aged form is bent', and asks younger generations to not 'stare at them because they're old and grey' because one day they too will be 'old and only in the way'.[44] Symbolically rebalancing economic inequality, the song also warns that the wealthy are not immune to frailties that come with ageing:

> All through life he has enjoyed everything that wealth could buy,
> But gold a life will never save.
> After all, he's like the poor: when his journey's nearly over,

Representation in American Animated Short Films, 1907-1954 (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009), 14.

[42] 'Uncle John Scruggs - banjo player - outtakes', Fox Movietone News Story 1-486, 8 November 1928, Moving Image Research Collections, University of South Carolina, available at www.mirc.sc.edu/islandora/object/usc%3A1868, accessed 5 February 2019.

[43] Chris Durman, 'African American Roots and Branches of the 5-String Banjo: A Selective Videography', *Notes* 72, no. 1 (2015): 208.

[44] Fiddlin' John Carson rerecorded the song in 1927 (OKeh 45273). Other artists who recorded the song include the Arkansas Woodchopper (Gennett 7175, 1930), Ted Chestnut (Challenge 422, 1928), and the Kentucky Girls (Columbia 15364-D, 1928).

Find he's only old and in the way.

First published in 1880, the song's refrain became a popular adage in discourses surrounding the negative effects of modernity on the elderly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[45] In a letter to a North Carolina newspaper in 1887, concerned citizen Mary Wilson opined that 'old age is not so honored and revered in this busy new world of ours as it is in parts of the old world … if there is not someone to love the aged they become indeed 'old and only in the way'.[46] More sombrely, over several decades the song's title was referenced in suicide letters of older people from Texas, Missouri, and across the country, who felt neglect from their distant families or were living in penury due to ageist exclusion from the industrial workforce.[47] During the First World War, the *Chattanooga News* in Tennessee reported of the incongruity of seeing so many 'men with silvered hair' entering industrial jobs usually associated with younger men, but praised the development, claiming that old men were patriots who 'heartily resent the thought of being "old and only in the way".'[48] The song's title resurfaced again in early twentieth century debates surrounding the societal disrespect sometimes displayed towards aged Confederate veterans, the poor provisions for veterans' homes, and universal old age pensions.[49]

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[45] P. J. Downey and L.T. Billings, *Old And Only In the Way* (New York: T.B. Harms & Co, 1880). Another source suggests it was Chicago songwriter Carl Raymond who wrote the song. Somewhat prophetically, Raymond died an elderly pauper in the early 1920s: 'Poor and Old and Only in the Way', *Polk County News* [Benton, Tennessee], 12 August 1920, 1.
[46] Mary Wilson, 'About Old Age', *Raleigh Christian Advocate* [NC], 2 February 1887, 4. An almost identical diatribe, including reference to the song, was published in a Kentucky newspaper in 1910: 'Don't Forget The Aged', *Messenger-Inquirer* [Owensboro, KY], 28 October 1910, 4. In 1883, an owner of a sheet music emporium in Charlotte, North Carolina flipped the message of the lyrics in an advertisement published in the local newspaper: 'Come and see me everybody. The older you are the less you're in the way': 'Old And Only In The Way', *Charlotte Observer* [NC], 9 September 1883, 4.
[47] E.g. 'Long Brown Dies Jolly', *Reno Gazette-Journal* [NA], 13 August 1887, 2; *El Paso Times* [El Paso, TX], 12 October 1899, 4; '"I'm In The Way", He Kills Himself', *Alton Evening Telegraph* [IL], 21 May 1908; '"Old And In Way," Hangs Self', *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* [MO], 6 December 1929, 3.
[48] 'Days Of Old Men', *Chattanooga News* [TN], 24 June 1918, 4.
[49] 'An Old Veteran', *Rockford Chronicle* [Rockford, AL], 22 November 1918, 2; 'Plan To Make Confederate Veterans' Home Place For Aged Men Of Entire State', *Nashville*

The song may have also had personal significance for Fiddlin' John Carson. During the United Textile Workers strike in 1914, Carson and his sons were fired from the Fulton Bag Cotton Mill and evicted from their mill homes in Cabbagetown on the outskirts of Atlanta. Although the labour struggle centred primarily on pay, housing, working conditions, and child workers' rights, another grievance was that companies were letting go of older white workers. An American Federation of Labor photograph taken while reporting the strike shows 'Mother' Deuprey despairing with arms raised outside the home she had recently been evicted from. The handwritten caption reads 'ancient victim' with an explainer that Deuprey had 'slaved 37 years on an average wage of $2.00 a week - in this mill.'[50] With this context in mind, it is easy to see how Carson and those millworkers who constituted his primary audience, both live and on record, could have related to the song's message. Indeed, there is even a kind of tragic agedness to his solo fiddle and vocal rendition, performed at a loose tempo and with downward scalic motifs that trail off as if his voice and hands were failing him.[51]

Tennessean, 1 June 1919, 23; 'A Trip To Texas With The Boys of 61', *Lincoln County News* [Lincolnton, NC], 18 October 1920, 3. Other uses of the song occurred outside the South. The song was played at a relief home for the elderly in Utah in 1894: 'Basin Bubbles', *Davis County Clipper* [Bountiful, UT], 21 June 1894, 1. A Kansan bank used the phrase to promote its saving accounts among young clients: *Topeka State Journal* [Topeka, KS], 5 May 1909. A commentator at the *Indianapolis Star* argued that sufficient old age pensions would stop the elderly feeling 'Old And Only In The Way': Anna Hoeltke Lee, 'Old Age Pensions For All', *Indianapolis Star*, 17 December 1918, 6.

[50] Photograph, 'Striker being evicted after working for 37 years at Fulton Bag and Cotton Mill', American Federation of Labor, c. 1914-1915, Fulton Bag and Cotton Mill, Strike of 1914-15 Collection, George Meany Memorial AFL-CIO Archive, University of Maryland, available at www.digitalcollections.library.gsu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/labor/id/4603, accessed 18 September 2019. These photographic depictions of elderly workers left to the 'scrap heap' of the industrial economy were prescient of some of the Works and Projects Administration's efforts to 'photograph the nation' two decades later: Ardis Cameron, 'Introduction', in *Looking for America: The Visual Production of Nation and People*, ed. Ardis Cameron, (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2008), 1-12.

[51] It is hard to tell whether the middle-aged Carson sang the song in reference to himself. Gene Wiggins suggests that when Carson introduced himself as 'old John', live and on record, he was presenting himself as a familiar figure, but not as an older performer: Gene Wiggins, *Fiddlin' Georgia Crazy: Fiddlin' John Carson, His Real World, And The World of His Songs* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1987), xviii.

Charlie Poole also recorded a version in 1928 (Columbia 15672-D), not long after working at the Leakesville Cotton Mill in North Carolina.[52] That Carson was not the only southern millhand to record 'Old And Only In The Way' suggests it held a particular meaning for the milieu he came from. This is not surprising considering the United Textile Workers, who likely represented Poole, was not only one of the strongest unions in the urban South, but also one of the most prominent advocates for older workers' rights in the South in the 1920s.[53] Poole's rendition is also significant for its inclusion of a stanza from the original song:

> There was a time I hear, when the young were not so queer,
> But since that time, there's come an awful change.
> Young men in health and might, their old parents they will strike,
> And it happens every day, it's nothing strange.

A similarly realistic account of 'elder abuse' is found in Uncle Dave Macon's 1927 record 'Poor Old Dad' (Vocalion 5159) in which the narrator comes across a young son beating his elderly father, whose 'bent form shook with age'.[54] The father pleads with his son to not send him to the poorhouse, or else expect the same fate when he too becomes a 'poor old dad'. The old mother, 'tottering footsteps slow', tries in vain to intervene and is killed, while the father ends up in the poorhouse. Both these songs are useful sources in contesting the claim of historian Peter Stearns that few cultural depictions of elder abuse occurred in the US before the mid-twentieth century, and that those that did came from exclusively

[52] Poole continued to live and entertain in nearby Spray, home to its own set of cotton mills. For Poole's early life, see Clifford Kinney Rorrer, *Rambling Blues: The Life & Songs of Charlie Poole* (London: Old Time Music, 1982).
[53] Gregory Wood, *Retiring Men: Manhood, Labor, and Growing Old in America, 1900-1960* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2012), 50-60.
[54] The soon was first published several years earlier: John W. Gibbons, *Poor Old Dad* (New York: T. B. Harms & Co., 1885), available at https://www.loc.gov/item/ihas.100006217/, accessed 5 February 2019. Walter Coon also recorded a version in 1930 (Superior 2544).

educated, literary figures, who used the issue to chastise the 'inherent' moral failures of the working class.[55]

Old-time records frequently associated old age with homelessness, disability, and poverty. Ernest Stoneman's 1927 record 'The Poor Tramp Has To Live' (Gennett 6044) describes a railway worker made penniless and homeless in old age:

> I'm a poor old railroad man, once a helping section hand,
> And old age is slowly creeping on the way.
> Now hard times are coming on, and my last gold dollar is gone,
> And this song is what I'm made to sing and play.

Unlike other records discussed here, it is clear that Stoneman was inspired by real elderly people to write the song, as his daughter recalled that he became friends with several homeless elderly railroad workers.[56] Stoneman's record, and others like it such as Henry Whitter's 'There Was An Old Tramp' (Broadway 8024) from 1926, more reflected the perceptions of a social correlation between ageing and homelessness, than any social reality.[57] The railway industry, ironically, was one of the most progressive in the nation in providing workers secure pension schemes, meaning relatively few would have suffered the fate Stoneman described.[58] Nevertheless, such songs fed into wider cultural narratives of the era concerning the aged in the industrial era. However, Norwood Tew's 'My Old Crippled

[55] Peter N. Stearns, 'Old Age Family Conflict: The Perspective of the Past', in *Elder Abuse: Conflict in the Family*, ed. Karl A. Pillemer and Rosalie S. Wolf (Dover, Massachusetts: Auburn House Publishing Company, 1986), 12-14.
[56] Stoneman's daughter later recalled to an interviewer that 'Daddy understood bums': Dorothy Horstman, *Sing Your Heart Out, Country Boy* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1975), 327.
[57] Most research suggests that the interwar homeless, particularly migratory 'hobos', were overwhelmingly young. The aged poor, who were more physically impaired, usually ended up in the local poorhouse, rather than the streets: Todd DePastino, *Citizen Hobo: How a Century of Homelessness Shaped America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 15. However, data on the historical correlation between homelessness and age is speculative at best: Peter H. Rossi, 'The Old Homeless and the New Homelessness in Historical Perspective', *The American Psychologist* 45 (1990): 954-959; Carl I. Cohen, 'Aging and Homelessness', *The Gerontologist* 39, no. 1 (March 1999): 5-14.
[58] Wood, *Retiring Men*, 23-43.

Daddy' (Bluebird B-6892) from 1937 provides a similarly gloomy image of the ageing male body in the context of rural work:

> I remember my childhood when daddy was strong,
> In the hot sun he laboured the busy day long.
> He tried to be honest and neighbourly fair,
> Now he waits for the master to call him up there.
>
> His life's work is over, he sits all alone,
> In the old wheelchair by the fire.
> His battle is won, the race has been run,
> And life holds a burden since his work is done.
>
> He lived for the saviour, tried to be fair,
> Now he waits for the master to call him up there.
> He's my bald, crippled daddy, I love him so dear.

Yet, unlike the pessimistic vision of old age in industrial workplaces of other songs, Tew's record is anchored by religious promises of the afterlife that made still demanding agricultural work more tolerable.

Race records expressed a similar despair at how age-related debility emasculated the working man. In 'Getting Older Every Day' from 1940 (OKeh 06116), Big Bill Broonzy gave a stark warning to his peers:

> You said you're getting old, that you're getting older every day.
> You ain't but fifty, you shouldn't be that way.
> When you get so old, you can't work at no mill,
> Don't you make no digs, that you can't fill.

Broonzy was part of the great wave of approximately 1.6 million black southerners who travelled north and west during the Great Migration between 1910 and 1940.[59] In the mid-1920s, Broonzy moved from the rural South to a booming postwar Chicago to work in the

[59] Dernoral Davis, 'Toward a Socio-Historical and Demographic Portrait of Twentieth-Century African-Americans', in *Black Exodus: The Great Migration from the American South*, ed. Alferdteen Harrison (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), 1-19; James N. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill: University North Carolina Press, 2005), 14; Erin Royston Battat, *Ain't Got No Home: America's Great Migrations and the Making of an Interracial Left* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 176.

city's large concentration of steel and meatpacking factories, known locally as the 'mills'.[60] Ageist hiring and firing policies were almost ubiquitous in big industry by the 1920s, but the Chicago mills had a particularly long history of labour agitation over such practices. Two organisations came into existence to fight factory ageism in the two decades before Broonzy's arrival in 1920: the Anti-Age Limit League and the Anti-Forty-Five Year Age Limit League. Unlike other anti-age limit organisations, the latter short-lived league for its time was a remarkably progressive coalition of white and black labour. In 1911, J. H. Lawrence, an aged black worker living in Chicago, was applauded by a rally of white workers after telling them 'You have a great idea behind this league …but it won't be a success unless you recognize the brotherhood of man'.[61] If anything, the recording of 'Getting Old Blues' in 1940 suggests how little these initially promising and progressive organisations achieved, particular for the black southern diaspora.

Female race recording artists also sang from a particular perspective of how the challenges of urban life for southern black migrants in the North could intensify with age. In the 1910s, singer Lucille Hegamin left her home from Macon, Georgia, moving around the country until ending up in New York where in 1921 she recorded 'Getting Old Blues' (Arto 9074), a song that described how old age compounded the economic hardships and racial prejudices that faced black migrants to Harlem, where Hegamin lived. A vicious combination of segregation, poverty, and lax renting regulations enabled white landlords and

[60] There is debate as to whether Broonzy was born in Scott, Mississippi, as he often claimed, or Jefferson, County, Arkansas, as biographers suggest. Broonzy worked at several Chicago factories, including the Phoenix Foundry, the American Brake Shoe Company and the American Car and Foundry in Chicago: Bob Riesman, *I Feel So Good: The Life and Times of Big Bill Broonzy* (University of Chicago Press, 2011), 43, 64; Kevin D. Greene, *The Invention and Reinvention of Big Bill Broonzy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 38-40.

[61] Like many anti-age limit lobbyists, these groups were products of an era in which increasingly women were being hired to work in factories, causing many unions to fear their presence as strike-breakers, and as replacements for older and physically weaker men. The J. H. Lawrence extract is quoted in Wood, *Retiring Men*, 38-40.

developers to exploit incoming minority tenants.[62] The first wave of southern African Americans to migrate to Harlem in large numbers arrived in the 1890s, meaning that by the 1920s this cohort would have begun to reach their senior years. Social insurance advocates of the era warned apocalyptically of the effect of urban living on aged populations.[63] For African Americans, the already difficult problem of sourcing and maintaining suitable urban housing for the aged was exasperated by the racial prejudices of exploitative landlords.[64] Through their records, Broonzy and Hegamin encapsulated a relatively unknown story of how ageing was another economic and social barrier for the black southern diaspora working and living in 'black meccas' such as Chicago and New York.

The Impotence Blues

Alongside old age songs concerning obsolescence at work were those about sexual impotence. In his 1939 song 'Getting Old Blues' (Decca 7599), Mississippi bluesman and recent arrival to Chicago, Johnnie Temple, laments that his voice is beginning to 'weaken' with age (despite Temple's powerful voice on the recording itself) and that he has a 'weakened heart', metaphorically and literally. Ageing even curtailed his control over women and sense of manhood: 'Baby used to cook my breakfast and bring it to bed / Now

[62] How much 'Getting Old Blues' reflected Hegamin's view of ageing in Harlem is questionable considering the song was written by a trio of white Tin Pan Alley songwriters including Walter Hirsch. However, it is entirely possible that Hegamin and listeners may have made such a 'reading' of the song: Len Kunstadt, 'The Lucille Hegamin Story', *Record Research*, November 1961, 3-7.

[63] In 1910, for example, Henry Rogers Seager wrote that 'The cost of maintaining an aged relative in the country is so small as to seem an insignificant burden. In the crowded tenement houses of modern cities the situation is very different. Here, as industry is now organized, there is little for an aged person to do. The positions for which men or women over sixty-five years of age are suited are few, and there is always an excess of old men and women looking for such positions. Furthermore, the cost of maintaining an aged relative in the city is an appreciable item in a wage earner's budget': Henry Rogers Seager, *Social Insurance: A Program of Social Reform* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1910), 117.

[64] For the historical intersection of age, race, and class issues in housing, see Leslie J. Pollard, *Complaint To The Lord: Historical Perspectives on the African American Elderly* (Selinsgrove, Pennsylvania: Susquehanna University Press, 1996). For housing in Harlem, see John T. Metzger, 'Rebuilding Harlem: Public Housing and Urban Renewal, 1920-1960', *Planning Perspectives* 9, no. 3 (1994): 225-96; Gilbert Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto: Negro New York, 1890-1930* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996).

since I lost my voice, well you say you wished I was dead.' In 'Mix That Thing Now' (Vocalion 1690) from 1931, Black Bottom McPhail also describes with simple innuendo how ageing impaired sexual activity:

> I often hear Grandma getting' Grandpa told,
> Looky-here, old man, you've done got too old.
> For to mix that thing, you can't mix that thing,
> And it's all over St. Louis, thinking about mixin' that thing.

Pigmeat Pete and Catjuice Charlie's 'Old Age Is Creeping Upon You' (Columbia 14513-D) and Monkey Joe's 'Old Man Blues' (OKeh 06153), made in 1929 and 1939 respectively, both referenced the maxim 'once a man and twice a child' to frame their concerns about male impotence. Monkey Joe confesses that he

> Done got to be an old man, mama,
> And my pencil won't draw one line.
> My good girl has gone and left me,
> She won't pay me no mind.

This song built on a pencil/lead metaphor theme that Bo Chatman first developed in 'My Pencil Won't Write No More' (OKeh 8912) in 1931:

> Now listen here folks, there's one thing sure,
> My old pencil won't write no more.
> Because the lead's all gone, oh, the lead's all gone,
> The pencil won't write no more.

One interpretation of these records is that depictions of sexual impotency symbolised a more general sense of 'impotence' that accompanied the shift from rural to industrial economies, including urban living, atomised work, and forced retirement.[65] What connects nearly all these 'impotent bluesmen' is their journey from southern plantations to northern factories, many of which had upper-age restrictions. The idea of retirement on

[65] The impotence theme in blues lyrics, though not necessarily age-related, is briefly mentioned in David Evans, *Big Road Blues: Tradition and Creativity in the Folk Blues* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 153; Stephen Calt, *Barrelhouse Words: A Blues Dialect Dictionary* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 253. For the Great Migration and blues lyrics, see Paul Oliver, *Blues Fell This Morning: Meaning in the Blues*, Second Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 42-44.

plantations in the Mississippi Delta, which usually entailed working alongside a sharecropper family, was certainly different than in the factories of Chicago.[66] Another interpretation of these songs, is that sexual impotence stood in for the emasculation of black men living under segregation. For sure, most bluesmen of the southern diaspora, disappointed at the harsh racial and class realities that lay in the 'Promised Land' over the Mason-Dixon line, reasserted their manhood by singing hypermasculine songs about male sexual conquest and control of women. Yet others borrowed age-related tropes to protest artistically their socio-economic and political emasculation.[67]

Some white old-time artists recorded similarly themed impotence songs, if for rather different reasons. In their 1940 record 'Poppa's Getting Old' (Bluebird B-8497), Dewey & Gassie Bassett associate ageing with being bedbound, bald, and abandoned by female lovers. Similarly, in his unsubtle 1932 release 'Organ Grinder Blues' (Victor 23763), Jimmie Davis claims his 'organ' had played its last tune:

> Gonna get me some monkey glands,
> Be like I used to was.
> Gonna run these mamas down,
> Like a Dominique rooster does.

As Angus McClaren argues in his cultural history of impotency, the interwar era was characterised by a growing supply and demand for 'radical new ways to restore manhood'. Whether by surgery, hormonal injections, sex aids, psychoanalysis, or prescribed animal glands, many Americans in the early twentieth century were seeking elaborate ways to avoid all kinds of impotence, but chiefly that associated with ageing. Many more, however, were not consumers, but witnesses to the rise of the 'rejuvenation' industry in beautification and healthcare. Satirical numbers such as 'Organ Grinder Blues' debunk the prominent contemporary idea, occasionally reproduced by historians of science, that rural, working-

[66] Wood, *Retiring Men*, 3-30.
[67] For the complex role of sexuality and male control in blues lyrics, see Paul Oliver, *Blues Fell This Morning*, 95-117; Allan Andrew Symons, 'Male Control and Female Resistance in American Roots Music Recordings of the Interwar Period' (PhD dissertation, University of Northumbria, 2018), 206-245.

class, and southern people were enthusiastic and passive consumers of quackery, and instead repositions them as occasionally sceptical critics.[68]

Several 1920s black women singers also satirised male impotency. In 'You Can't Do What My Last Man Did' (Columbia 14112-D), race recording artist Ethel Waters sings to her failing lover, played by accompanist Slow Kid Thomas. Waters claims her lover, who is 'mighty old to be so bold', is so impotent that she suspects he requires monkey glands. Waters was not the only female performer to record songs about male impotence from a feminine perspective. In 'Worn Out Papa Blues' (Columbia 14527-D), Bessie Smith describes an ex-lover as a 'worn-out, badly neglected thing' who has lost all his 'pep', and herself as a 'red hot woman just full of flaming youth'. On the surface, both Waters and Smith in these songs challenge male power with a demeaning image of older age. Although this interpretation is certainly valid for their respective performances, that both songs were originally written by men complicates any retrospective interpretation of them as 'proto-feminist' sources.[69] Moreover, it is significant that the 'last man' in Waters' song is 'seventy years old' and makes love to her 'like a lover should'. Evidently, age did not always signify impotency. In 'My Old Daddy's Got A Brand New Way To Love' (Victor 20651), Alberta Hunter claims her older lover has developed an original, if unspecified, method for satisfying her sexual appetite.

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[68] Although impotency can derive from a number of medical and social conditions, not least syphilis and other sexually-transmitted diseases (each, incidentally, with their own set of race and old-time records), McLaren shows that ageing was a frequently cited cause of impotency: Angus McLaren, *Impotence: A Cultural History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 197-199.

[69] 'You Can't Do What My Last Man Did' was first recorded in 1923 by James P. Johnson (Victor 19123), who was also one of the song's composers. Like several of Smith's songs expressing ideas of feminine sexuality, it was a man, Spencer Williams, who wrote the lyrics. For issues of gender and sexuality in the careers and performances of female blues singers, see Angela Y Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude 'Ma' Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998); Hazel Carby, 'It Jus Be's Dat Way Sometime: The Sexual Politics of Women's Blues', in *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. Robin R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1993), 351-365; Daphne Duval Harrison, *Black Pearls: Blues Queens of the 1920s* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1988).

While many records described the declining sexual potency of older men, only a few depicted the sexual desires of older women. On his 1938 release, 'Get Away Old Woman' (Bluebird 7986), Jazz Gillum is repulsed by a drunk old woman, citing her balding as just one aspect of her declining looks: 'There was a time you had long hair / But now it's gone, the stuff ain't there.' By contrast, Ed Bell's 1927 record 'Ham Bone Blues' (Paramount 12524) depicts aged female sexuality positively in a reflection of why his grandfather was still attracted to his grandmother: 'She got the same jelly roll she had forty years ago.' Coming to an equitable balance, Clara Smith and Lonnie Johnson (using the pseudonym 'Tommy Jordan') trade off increasingly harsh comments about the other's sexual failures on their 1930 release 'You're Getting Old On Your Job' (Columbia 14568-D), tellingly by using the metaphor of 'work'.

Canes, Dentures, and Rocking Chairs

Whether too old for the workplace or the bedroom, the dominant theme of many of these records was a sense of feebleness. Some records centred on physical objects that evoked notions of a feeble old age, namely walking canes, dentures, and rocking chairs. In the spiritual song 'Hand Me Down My Walking Cane', recorded by over twenty recording artists before 1945, the protagonist faces their own mortality and so takes their walking cane to catch the 'midnight train' and watch as their sins are taken away.[70] The walking cane becomes a potent symbol for the literal and spiritual 'journey' from the later stages of life to salvation. More comically, in 'When It's Toothpickin' Time In False Teeth Valley' (Bluebird B-8795) from 1940, the Pine Ridge Boys describe a geriatric town caught up in denture fever:

> Where the people wear their false teeth by the score.
> They ain't got no teeth to eat.
> Only cornbread and fat beef,

[70] The song was written by blackface minstrelsy song writer James Bland in 1880. For the many old-time recordings of the song, see Russell, *Country Music Records*, 1058.

Because they had them pulled out forty years before.

Although played for laughs, the lyrics were a response to real developments in old age healthcare. The boost to the dentistry profession following the First World War meant dentures were becoming big business. Greater life expectancy meant an increasingly ageing population in need of dental treatment. The Pine Ridge Boys subtly criticise the profit-drive of a denture industry that produced poor quality 'store-bought teeth': one old lady of False Teeth Valley keeps her dentures in her pockets because they are too big for her mouth, reflecting a commonplace complaint among consumers about cheaper, mass-produced dentures.[71] Nevertheless, the song was hardly sympathetic to the elderly. The idea that retirees might idly live their latter days out in luxury, and become suckers to huckster denture companies, belittled older people. Although False Teeth Valley is situated in 'sunny Caroline', the imagined town is prophetic of the comic visions of 'gerontopian' retirement communities in Florida that percolated in popular culture later in the twentieth century.[72]

Few objects, however, simultaneously capture a sense of both southerness and agedness quite like the rocking chair. The 'wooden rocker' or 'easy chair' encapsulated notions of the supposedly easy-going pace of the rural South *and* the slower tempo of later life. As material culture, rocking chairs were significant pieces of furniture on the iconic southern 'front porch', helping rural southerners, especially the elderly, escape indoor and outdoor heat while retaining a breeze. Rockers were also associated with (grand)parenthood as their gentle rocking motions help parents and grandparents soothe young children to sleep. For this reason, they have contributed to the notion of old age as a 'second childhood' due to their similarity to cribs. Even more derogatorily, the 'non-activity' of whiling away time on a rocking chair was also associated with those who did not work, whether retirees or

[71] For interwar developments in American dentistry and denture manufacture see Alyssa Picard, *Making the American Mouth: Dentists and Public Health in the Twentieth Century* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 14-41.
[72] Larry Polivka, 'The Global Florida: Long-Term Care in Postindustrial Countries', in *The Cultural Context of Aging: Worldwide Perspectives*, ed. Jay Sokolovsky, Third Edition (New York: ABC-CLIO, 2008), 576-588.

'lazy' southerners. While a rocking chair is nearly constantly moving when in use, it is also a stationary object, and therefore symbolically representative of both the immobility of old age and a sense of 'stillness' or 'backwardness' frequently associated with southern culture.

Several songs were recorded about rocking chairs, but few were as popular or iconic as Hoagy Carmichael's 'Rockin' Chair', sung from the perspective of an elderly parent who sits with his cane at his rocking chair awaiting his death in an old wooden cabin. Although Carmichael never lived in the South, references in the song to a cabin and flies buzzing around the rocking chair evoked a sense of heat, rurality, and 'southerness'. Louis Armstrong made a hit of the record in 1929 with Carmichael singing the 'father' part and Armstrong acting out the part of his 'son' in a call-and-response duet (OKeh 8756). Armstrong biographers claim that it was he who asked Carmichael to sing the main lyric. If true, it is possible the jazz star, ironically for an artist later known as 'Pops', did not wish to play the elderly 'pappy' role.[73] Armstrong maintained this age dynamic in future versions of 'Rockin' Chair', most famously with Jack Teagarden. Echoing age masquerade, Armstrong at least once employed a musician to don a fake white beard for the part.[74] It is significant that Armstrong, who later in his life faced accusations for 'Uncle Tomming' to lucrative white audiences, decided, like other black artists, against playing up to the character of a nostalgic elderly black man at this early stage of his career.[75] Armstrong's solution,

[73] Thomas Brothers, *Louis Armstrong, Master of Modernism* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014), 362-364. Laurence Bergreen suggests that the 'Pops' nickname originally was honorific for older statesmen of New Orleans jazz, such as Bunk Johnson. Ironically, Armstrong earned the name through his use of the term in reference to other musicians: Laurence Bergreen, *Louis Armstrong: An Extravagant Life* (New York: Broadway Books, 1997), 161.

[74] Ricky Riccardi, '80 Years of Rockin' Chair', *The Wonderful World of Louis Armstrong*, 16 December 2009, available at http://dippermouth.blogspot.com/2009/12/80-years-of-rockin-chair.html, accessed 8 February 2019.

[75] Armstrong was not the only person of colour to record the song. Mildred Bailey, who had shared African-American and Native American ancestry, recorded the song several times, including in 1932 (Victor 24117), earning her the nickname 'The Rockin' Chair Lady': Chad Hamill, 'American Indian Jazz: Mildred Bailey and the Origins of America's Most Musical Art Form', in *Indigenous Pop: Native American Music from Jazz to Hip Hop*, ed. Jeff Berglund, Jan Johnson, and Kimberli Lee (Tuscon: University of Arizona Press, 2016), 33-47.

however, tied him to an age dynamic that was equally problematic: when Armstrong sings the 'child' role to Carmichael's 'father', it is hard not hear echoes of the racist language used to infantilise adult black men as 'boys'.[76]

Few other race recording artists performed songs that associated rocking chairs with old age, but some old-time artists did.[77] In the 1932 song 'Rockin' Alone (In An Old Rockin' Chair)' (Victor 23745), Bob Miller paints a much less nostalgic picture of the elder and their rocking chair:

> Sitting alone in an old rocking chair,
> I saw an old mother with silvery hair.
> She looked so neglected by those who should care,
> Rocking alone in an old rocking chair.
>
> Her hands were all callused and wrinkled and old,
> A life of hard work was the story they told.
> And I thought of angels when I saw her there,
> Rocking alone in an old rocking chair.

As Dorothy Horstman suggests, Miller's song 'deplores popular attitudes toward old people', with the rocking chair associated with loneliness, neglect, and morality.[78] Vacant rocking chairs were also powerfully symbolic images on several old-time records in the 1930s, including Cousin Levi With His Carolina Bluebirds' 'Dad's Vacant Chair' (Bluebird B-7522), the Three Tobacco Tags' 'Mother's Old Rockin' Chair' (Bluebird B-6902), and Frank Luther and Buddy Ross' 'There's An Old Easy Chair By The Fireplace' (Decca 5357). These songs almost sacralised the vacant rocking chair of deceased elders as Civil

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[76] Armstrong perceived his role to be a 'child' in the song. In a 1937 radio performance, Armstrong introduces trumpeter Louis Bacon as the 'old man' and himself as the 'little boy'. Although in this particular instance, the elderly character, Bacon, was played by a black musician: Louis Armstrong, 'Rockin' Chair', *Fleischmann's Yeast Show & Louis Home Recorded Tapes*, (Jazz Heritage Society 52889147, 2008).

[77] E.g. Three Tobacco Tags, 'Rock Me To Sleep In An Old Rocking Chair' (Bluebird B-8572, 1938); Don White, 'Rockin' Chair' (Bluebird unissued, 1936).

[78] Dorothy Horstman, *Sing Your Heart Out, Country Boy*, 215. A selection of other artists who recorded 'Rockin' Alone (In An Old Rockin' Chair)' include Blue Ridge Mountain Girls (Champion S-16743, 1933), Tex Owens (Decca 5187, 1934), Light Crust Doughboys (Vocalion unissued, 1938), Judie and Julie (Bluebird B-8411, 1939), Frank Luther (Banner 32629, 1932), Roy Shaffer (Bluebird B-8267, 1939); Dixieland Swingsters (Bluebird B-8090, 1939), and Carl Boling & His Four Aces (Bluebird B-8638, 1940).

War songs had done in connection to soldiers leaving home, such as the 'Old Vacant Chair' and 'Old Wooden Rocker'.[79]

Are You Going To Miss The Old Folks?

Perhaps the most prominent narrative of these records about old age is that of 'the old folks' (elderly parents of adult children) who remains at 'home' (whether the Appalachian Mountains, a small southern town, the plantation, or the South more generally) and whose children have moved to faraway locations (whether a city or out of the South). This entire subgenre descends from a number of popular nineteenth century minstrelsy and Tin Pan Alley tunes, including 'Ise Gwine Back To Dixie', 'I Wonder How The Old Folks Are At Home' and 'The Old Folks At Home (Swanee River)'. The latter, written by Stephen Foster in 1851, was one of the biggest-selling songs of its era, selling over twenty million copies of sheet music.[80] Again, some of these songs featuring elderly black parents reflected ideas amongst white southerners in the late nineteenth century that blacks who had moved north longed for the securities of slavery. The recording of these songs by old-time and race artists suggests they continued to appeal to early twentieth century audiences.[81] It is significant that 'Old Folks At Home' became the Florida state anthem in 1935 just as

[79] Ironically, these two songs began as Unionist songs during the Civil War, but were recorded by several southern old-time artists, including the Dixon Brothers (Bluebird B-6582, 1936) and Chubby Parker (Champion 1613, 1930).
[80] Ken Emerson, *Doo-Dah!: Stephen Foster and the Rise of American Popular Culture* (London: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 179-183.
[81] For Tin Pan Alley's representation of Dixie and its complex relationship to Lost Cause ideology, see John Bush Jones, *Reinventing Dixie: Tin Pan Alley's Songs and the Creation of the Mythic South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015); Miller, *Segregating Sound*, 34-35. Charles A. White's 'Ise Gwine Back To Dixie' (Boston: White, Smith & Company, 1874) was recorded by Uncle Dave Macon (Vocalion 5157, 1927). Herbert S. Lambert and F. W. Vandersloot's 'I Wonder How The Old Folks Are At Home' (Valdersloot Music Publishing Co., Williamsport, Pennsylvania, 1909) was recorded by Karl and Harty (Paramount 3311, 1931) and the Jackson County Ramblers (Gennett 7224, 1930). E. P. Christy's 'The Old Folks At Home (Swanee River)' (New York: Firth, Pond & Co., 1851) was recorded by Monroe Quartette (OKeh 45141, 1927), Nicholoson's Players (Gennett 7125, 1930), Vaughan Quartet (Gennett unissued, 1924), Gene Autry & Jimmy Long (Banner 32761, 1933), and Jimmy Long & Beverley Long (Champion 16663, 1933).

modern Florida tourism was flourishing once again, after having been slowed down by the Depression. As David Nelson argues, the Florida exhibit at Chicago's Century of Progress World Fair in 1933 was the beginning of a campaign to promote an attractive vision of the state, devoid of the racial tensions that actually existed there.[82] With Florida being one of the most wholeheartedly segregationist states, with the highest per capita lynching rate in all the South, the fact that one of the highlights of the exhibit was a diorama dramatizing the song 'Old Folks At Home', with images of elderly blacks peacefully gathered around an old cabin, seems wishful at best.[83]

While not erasing the deeply racialised origins of these songs, they clearly appealed to a diverse set of audiences, from rural white and black southerners who had migrated to cities or northern or western states for work, to first- and second-generation European migrants longing for their families in the 'Old Country'. The diversity of black and white artists who recorded 'You're Going To Miss The Old Home, Jim' testifies to the appeal of 'old folks' songs for audiences of different audiences.[84] A 1928 version by Lulu Jackson (Vocalion 1193), a light-skinned African American artist who sang in what discographer Tony Russell describes as the 'hillbilly idiom', but whose records were released on Vocalion's race series, encapsulates how the song's appeal went beyond simple demarcations of 'white' and 'black'.[85] The lyrics describe the trials of an adult son, 'Jim', who travels away from his rural home to the big city, only to return penniless and sick to his

[82] An image of the diorama is reprinted in David Nelson, 'When Modern Tourism Was Born: Florida at the World Fairs and on the World Stage in the 1930s', *Florida Historical Quarterly* 88, no. 4 (2010): 435, 450.
[83] For historical lynching statistics, see 'Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror', Equal Justice Initiative, 2015, available at https://lynchinginamerica.eji.org/report, accessed 5 June 2019.
[84] Race recordings of the song include: Eva Parker (Victor V38020, 1927); Ethel Waters (Gennett unissued, 1929); Blue Lu Barker (Decca 7560, 1938); Helen Corbett (Decca unissued, 1934). Although some of these artists were born outside of the South, many had roots in the South, or performed extensively in the region. Old-time versions include R.C. Garner (Jubilee Gospel Singers 10104, 1925); Kenny Harrel (Victor unissued, 1929); the Girls of the Golden West (Bluebird B-5394, 1934) Several versions by popular recording artists preceded these roots renditions, including Byron G. Harlan and Frank C. Stanley (Edison Gold Moulded Record 8468, 1903), Will Oakland & Chorus (Edison Blue Amberol 2030, 1913), and Lewis James & The Shannon Quartet (Victor 19266, 1923).
[85] Russell, *Country Music Records*, 430.

aged mother, whose 'hair had turned to silk by the touch of time'. Much as old fiddlers acted as mirrors for southerners to reflect on the contemporary world, so the lyrics to the 'You're Going To Miss the Old Home, Jim' juxtapose the reliability and security of an ageing mother's love with the undependability and dangers of modernity. Composed near the turn of the century by James Thornton, an Irish American Tin Pan Alley songwriter, the song drew from a rich tradition of Irish 'mother' songs, and likely appealed to Irish Americans, not least those in the South, who held strong emotional and even monetary connections to their aged parents back in Ireland.[86] More cynically, the song suited acts such as Aunt Jemima Novelty Four in 1929 (Brunswick 7056) because the elderly protagonist vaguely resembled their namesake, and Benny Borg in 1927 (Columbia 15148-D) because the white southern singer was known as 'Singing Soldier'. Even if such songs held relatively universal appeal across racial divides, commercial influences, such as the machinations of song publishers who reaped greater pay-outs when songs were rerecorded by an array recording artists from different genres, may also explain their numerous releases.[87]

Just as 'old folks' songs initially were a response to the displacement following the Civil War, the old-time and race recordings of them can be partially attributed to the transitions and traumas of the early twentieth century, especially the First World War, the Great Migration, and the 'residential revolution'.[88] For the displaced, predominantly young members of the southern diaspora, images of 'old folks' served two functions: they acted as

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[86] For Irish 'mother songs', see Maureen Dezell, *Irish America: Coming Into Clover* (New York: Anchor Books, 2002), 100-102. For some examples of how some Irish migrants in the South in the nineteenth century were intimately connected with older family members, particularly aged mothers, in Ireland, see David T. Gleeson, *The Irish in the South, 1815-1877* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 65-67.

[87] For the influence of song publishers in the recording industry, particularly for 'hillbilly' records, see William Howland Kenney, *Recorded Music in American Life: The Phonograph and Popular Memory, 1890-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 135-157.

[88] The notion of a 'residential revolution', in which the conditions of modernity changed family structures, leaving the elderly living alone, is debated. The Depression, for example, disrupted this trend. However, some demographic changes to housing arrangements did occur for some aged Americans in this era. More importantly, there was a growing *perception* of a residential revolution, even if the reality was much more complex: Carole Haber and Brian Gratton, *Old Age and the Search for Security: An American Social History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 11.

anchors that stabilised the emotions of young generations, grounding them in a rural southern past that was simple and understandable; at the same time, they served as measures of the movement and speed of modernity. Modern transport regularly featured in songs about the 'old folks at home', as in the Monroe Brothers' 1936 song 'I Am Thinking Tonight Of The Old Folks' (Bluebird B-6773), wherein the protagonist's old mother in Tennessee eagerly awaits the return of her railway-riding son. In her history of homesickness and nostalgia, Susan J. Matt outlines the effect of modern transportation and migration trends on many Americans' senses of place, home, and time:

> After the Civil War, many more realized that these [technological] innovations … made it easier to return to a physical home and thus, at least theoretically, easier to assuage homesickness. Upon traveling back, however, they found they had not arrived, and never could, for the same technologies that had brought them home had also disrupted traditional ways of life. Home was gone, lost in the past. And while space could be traversed, time could not. This realization was at the heart of nostalgia … new technologies of travel may have reduced homesickness but increased nostalgia.[89]

As Matt argues, longings for particular places or pasts were increasingly medicalised phenomena and particularly associated with 'moving' populations such as the southern diaspora.[90]

In this narrative, that the generations increasingly were being separated by geography and culture, the oppositional acts of 'remembering' and 'forgetting' older relatives became an essential part of filial (ir)responsibility. Jewell Tillman Burns & Charlie D. Tillman' 'Don't Forget The Old Folks' (Columbia 15025-D) and Emry Arthur's 'Remember The Old Folks Back Home' (Vocalion 5396), both made in 1929, describe how younger family members who had moved away from their home and elderly parents could honour them merely by 'remembering'. Some songs portrayed a similarly pensive sentiment by asking whether elderly parents still remembered their children. In 'I Wonder Do The Old

[89] Susan J. Matt, *Homesickness: An American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 130.
[90] Ibid, 94.

Folks Think Of Me' (Vocalion 5300) from 1928, Floyd Thompson, accompanied by his band, the (appropriately-named) Home Towners, sings of wandering so far from his 'home town' that his aged parents might not remember him. Although scholars continue to debate the exceptionality of southern filial affection, these recordings, like the multi- and inter-generationalism discussed in previous chapters, suggest there existed a strong *idea* that southerners should honour their familial elders.[91] The archetypal 'old folks' song became a stock structure in southern music. Even non-southern songwriters who specialised in 'southern'-sounding compositions penned 'old folks' songs. In 1938, Tex Morton, a New Zealand songwriter who wrote dozens of Jimmie Rodgers-esqe yodels songs, composed his own paean to old folks, 'I'm Dreaming Tonight Of The Old Folks' that was recorded a year later by a real southerner, Texan singer Dickie McBride (Decca 5734).

Other social changes made the comforting images of 'old folks' appealing. Songs about old folks who were still married after so many years, such as Bill Chitwood's 'Pa, Ma And Me' (Brunswick 2884), Sam Cole & His Corn Huskers' 'Ma and Pa and Me' (Banner 32149), and Cliff Bruner's Texas Wonderers' 'My Daddy, My Mother and Me' (Decca 54875), provided elderly role models whose longevity implicitly defended the institution of marriage. Much like the old married couple act Ma and Pa McCormick, such songs are contextualised by fears of growing divorce rates. While divorce in the South was anything but easy - South Carolina did not legalise divorce until 1948 - southern states collectively saw the most rapid increase in divorce rates out of all US regions.[92]

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[91] For several historical debates about filial piety in the southern family, see Jennifer Pittman, 'Southern Families', ed. M. J. Coleman and L. H. Ganong, *The Social History of the American Family: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Sage, 2014), 1255-1258; Craig Thompson Friend and Anya Jabour, eds., *Family Values in the Old South* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011); Scott Stephan, *Redeeming the Southern Family: Evangelical Women and Domestic Devotion in the Antebellum South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011).

[92] These divorce rates were collated from data ranging over a broad period from 1890-1963. Substantially different state laws and gaps in the data, however, make this figure sceptical at best. 'The South', from these statistics, includes most of the former Confederate states. Alexander A. Plateris, *100 Years of Marriage and Divorce Statistics, United States, 1867-1967*, (Rockville, Maryland: National Center for Health Statistics, 1973), 12.

Other records depicted aged motherhood or fatherhood individually, and those images of 'grey-haired mothers' and 'silver-haired daddies' provide some indication of how notions of gender refracted ideas about old age. In a recent analysis of the preponderance of 'mother songs' in old-time music, Allan Symons interprets the idealised motherhood on old-time records as challenges to the 'new woman' of the 1920s but it is significant that many of these songs were about *aged* mothers.[93] The song 'I Have An Aged Mother', recorded by John McGhee (Gennett 6419) in 1927, and the Carter Family (Montgomery Ward M-7446) in 1930, exemplifies the core traits of this subgenre of mother songs. Sung from the perspective of a man who receives a letter from his sister that his aged mother is dying ('Come home, we're all alone / Dear mother's slowly fading, she can't be living long') the protagonist becomes heartbroken and guilty when his mother dies before he returns home to see her.[94] The gender roles in the song are clear: by moving away, the son has failed to honour and care for his aged mother; the daughter has become the default primary carer of their elderly parent; and the mother has thanklessly remained a loving parent to her children until her death. A similar family dynamic is heard on 'There's A Mother Old And Gray (Who Needs Me Now)', recorded by several old-time artists, in which a daughter turns down a prospective partner in order to care for her elderly mother.[95] These songs were tainted with a nostalgia for the Old South in reflecting the family structures in which the burden of elder care more often, though not always, defaulted to younger women, rather than the early

[93] While depictions of mothers were common on race records, such songs generally focused on deceased mothers and the afterlife, rather than *elderly* mothers: Allan Andrew Symons, 'Male Control and Female Resistance in American Roots Music Recordings of the Interwar Period', (PhD dissertation, University of Northumbria, 2018), 29-74.
[94] Other artists who recorded the song include Asa Martin, (Banner 32651, 1932), Cleve Chaffin (Gennett rejected, 1927), and the Crowder Brothers (ARC rejected, 1936).
[95] The 1911 sheet music for the song features an imagine on the cover of the eponymous mother cooling herself with a fan: George H. Diamond, 'There's A Mother Old And Gray Who Needs Me Now', (Chicago: Harold Rossiter Music Co., 1911), available at https://library.indstate.edu/about/units/rbsc/kirk/PDFs/ps1911_theres_a_mother.pdf, accessed 3 June 2019. Old-time recordings of the song include Ed Rice (Vocalion 5212, 1928), Mrs and Mrs Hugh Cross (Columbia 15575-D, 1929), Roy Harvey (Columbia unissued, 1930), Jack and Leslie (Decca 5671, 1938), and the Virginia Dandies (Crown 3103, 1931).

twentieth century, when elders increasingly were living in separate homes from their offspring.[96]

The theme of elder neglect was repeated on other records. In his 1936 record 'My Mother Is Lonely' (Bluebird B-8966), Ernest Tubb expressed his anxiety that his mother was isolated and lonely at home, a kind of neglect of responsibility that put his own manhood at stake. Similarly themed songs such as Johnnie Gates' 'Don't Leave Mother Alone' (Columbia 15573-D) and Frank & James McCravy's 'Don't Forget To Drop Mother A Line' (Columbia 15764-D), both from 1930, or Richard Brooks and Reuben Puckett's 1925 'Always Think of Mother' (Columbia 15029-D), echoed the associations medical professionals and commentators of the same period were making between old age and loneliness, perceived as a 'modern epidemic' of industrialised societies. Their focus on mothers rather than fathers reflected popular beliefs that women were more emotionally vulnerable than men.[97] Several 1930s records portrayed older mothers as sensitive, referring to them as 'sweet' and 'dear' old ladies, including Bob Miller's 'Story of A Dear Old Lady' (ARC unissued), Dwight Butcher's 'Sweet Old Lady' (Victor 23810), and the Vagabonds' 'An Old Sweet Song For A Sweet Old Lady' (Bluebird B-5381). However, that there existed equivalent songs in the period about elderly fathers - such as 'My Dear Old Daddy' (Cliff Carlisle and Fred Kirby, ARC rejected) and 'Old Daddy Dear' (Hugh Cross, Brunswick rejected) - suggests that a similar affective association existed for elders generally. As well as being lonely and vulnerable, the aged mothers on records such as Gene Autry's 1934 'There's a Little Old Lady Waiting' (Banner 33070) were expected to wait passively for their children to contact them. If depictions of mothers on records were responses to the

[96] For the role of women as carers for the infirm and elderly in the nineteenth century South, see Christine Jacobson Carter, *Southern Single Blessedness: Unmarried Women in the Urban South, 1800-1865* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 73-77. The advent of social security helped create greater levels of independent living, thereby separating the lived spheres of the generations: Stearns, 'Old Age Family Conflict: The Perspective of the Past', 10.

[97] Fay Bound Alberti, 'This "Modern Epidemic": Loneliness as an Emotion Cluster and a Neglected Subject in the History of Emotions', *Emotion Review* 10, no. 3 (1 July 2018): 242-254;

'New Women' of the interwar era, the *immobility* of elderly mothers at the home was the perfect counterpoint to the increasing *mobility* of young women gradually pushing the boundaries of women roles at home and at work.[98]

Another important theme in songs about aged mothers is the emotional relationship between a male narrator and the old bible of their aged mother. In the Three Tobacco Tags' 'Mother's Torn and Faded Bible' (Bluebird B-6668) from 1936, the McCravy Brothers 'My Mother's Old Bible Is True' (Victor V-40218) from 1929, and 'My Mother's Bible (recorded by several old-time artists), the age of the mothers paralleled that of their 'worn', 'torn', 'faded', or 'old' bibles.[99] Family bibles were vital fixtures in many southern households. Alongside their educative, spiritual, moral, and decorative value, bibles were usually inherited, making them also material reminders of family elders, with names of ancestors inscribed on the family trees handwritten onto their inside sleeves.[100] Songs about the bible were hardly unusual, but these records about worn bibles owned by equally 'worn' elderly parents, gave the impression that the strength of old-time religion was corroding. The Three Tobacco Tags, after all, recorded their ode to aged mothers and faded bibles in a state where religious fundamentalist opposition to the teaching of evolution in schools was coordinated by a lobbying group called the North Carolina Bible League.[101]

The ageing female body likewise embodied the changing of the times, but also the virtuous sacrifice associated with traditional notions of motherhood. On the 1933 record 'My Mother's Beautiful Hands' (Bluebird B-5201), Bradley Kincaid links the wrinkles of his mother to her lifelong servitude as a caregiver:

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[98] Amanda S. Barusch, *Foundations of Social Policy: Social Justice in Human Perspective*, Fifth Edition (Stamford: Cengage Learning, 2015), 452-453; Tom Lee, *The Tennessee-Virginia Tri-Cities: Urbanization in Appalachia, 1900-1950* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2005), 125-127.
[99] For the many versions of 'My Mother's Bible', see Russell, *Country Music Records*, 1110.
[100] Seth Perry, 'American Bible Bindings and Formats', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible in America*, ed. Paul C. Gutjahr (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 60-78.
[101] Willard B. Gatewood Jr., 'Politics and Piety in North Carolina: The Fundamentalist Crusade at High Tide, 1925-1927', *North Carolina Historical Review*, no. 42 (July 1965): 275-291.

Those beautiful, beautiful hands,
Though wrinkled with age they grew.
But they still they toiled on for child so dear,
And her love seemed more tender and true.

The most common physical sign of ageing on records, however, was silver, white, or grey hair, the last most regularly associated with stress and mortality. In his 1936 song, 'Don't Cause Mother's Hair To Turn Grey' (Bluebird B-6324), J. E. Mainer stresses that incommunicative sons should be blamed for greying their mothers' hair. In 'The Days Of My Childhood Plays' (Victor V-40076) from 1928, Alfred Karnes recalls older days when his mother was 'so happy, her hair not near so white.' At the same time, the suffering associated with grey or white hair made it a sacralised aspect of motherhood, and not only in the South. Cowboy and western songs, such as Roy Rogers' 'That Pioneer Mother of Mine' (ARC 8-04-51) from 1937, valorised the grey hairs of mothers as indicators of their sacrifices in opening the frontier. Canadian singer Wilf Carter, known as Montana Slim for US releases, specialised in songs about the greying mothers of cowboys such as 'My Little Grey Haired Mother In The West' (Bluebird B-4976).[102] Similarly, several Irish-American 'mother songs' also idealised greying hair.[103] Depictions of greying mothers even worked for Jim & Bob, the 'Genial Hawaiians', who in 1933 recorded 'There's A Little Gray Mother Dreaming' (Bluebird B-6056), two years before a version by the Light Crust Doughboys (Vocalion 02872) from Fort Worth, Texas.

No song sacralised grey hair, however, quite like Gene Autry and Jimmy Long's 'That Silver Haired Daddy of Mine'.[104] Long and Autry began their careers imitating the

[102] Similar songs include two Wilf Carter songs: 'Memories Of My Grey Haired Mother In The West' (Bluebird B-4608, 1936) and 'Cowboy Don't Forget Your Mother' (Bluebird B-4979, 1934).
[103] E.g. Howard Johnson and Theodore Morse, 'M-O-T-H-E-R' (New York: Leo Feist, 1915)
[104] Jimmy Long, who co-composed the song, released it to little commercial success in 1931 (Champion 16190). Autry was often given a credit, although initially Long credited the song to himself. Another account suggests a convict wrote the song: Don Cusic, *Gene Autry: His Life and Career* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2007), 148. Autry claimed later claimed he was inspired to write the song after hearing the song 'Dear Old Daddy, You've

blue yodelling style of Jimmie Rodgers, and their 1931 song 'Silver Haired Daddy', lyrically at least, built on the theme of numerous 'Daddy' songs Rodgers recorded in the late 1920s. In 'Daddy And Home' (Victor 21757), for example, Rodgers describes his elderly father in 'an old southern town' whose 'hair has turned to silver' and body is failing. Regretting his departure and lifestyle choices, Rodgers promises to return home. 'Silver Haired Daddy' is remarkably similar:

> In a vine covered shack in the mountains,
> Bravely fighting the battle of time.
> There's a dear one who's weathered life's sorrow,
> It's that silver haired daddy of mine
>
> If I could recall all the heartaches,
> Dear old Daddy, I've caused you to bear.
> If I could erase those lines from your face,
> And bring back the gold to your hair.
>
> If God would but grant me the power,
> Just to turn back the pages of time.
> I'd give all I own if I could but atone,
> To that silver haired daddy of mine.

'Silver Haired Daddy' reached far and wide, selling more than half a million records over its first five years, particularly after Autry re-recorded it in 1935 (Vocalion 0299). When this figure is added to sales by other artists who recorded the song, its 'reach' surpassed most other old-time records of the era, arguably even becoming a 'cross-over' popular hit.[105] As well as on record, the song could be heard on multiple media. Firstly, it took Autry onto radio via the *National Barn Dance* where he reinforced its popularity through countless on-air performances. In 1935, the song was the centrepiece of Autry's first feature film, *Tumbling Tumbleweeds*, a movie that helped craft the singing cowboy movie

Been More Than a Mother to Me': Jack Hurst, 'Gene Autry: The Apprenticeship of One Smart Singing Cowboy', *Chicago Tribune*, 7 August 1983.

[105] A selection of artists who recorded the song includes Lester McFarland and Robert Gardner (Melotone M12404, 1932), Dick Robertson (Crown 3265, 1932), Frank Luther and Carson Robison (Melotone M12371, 1932), the Girls of the Golden West (Bluebird B-5167, 1933), the Log Cabin Boys (Decca 5110, 1935), and Frank and James McCravy (Decca unissued, 1935).

genre.[106] The front cover of a 1932 edition of the song's sheet music features an illustration of an elderly man with bright white hair.[107] In 1933, a Missouri woman requested her local newspaper publish the lyrics in honour of her own elderly father. The song became a popular choice for events celebrating Father's Day, a relatively recently established tradition that, perhaps not coincidently, had its roots in the South.[108] In 1936, the editor of *Stand By!* noted that the lyrics of the song were the most requested by readers that year.[109] For several years, the record defined Autry's career: he reportedly sang alongside a playback of the record for live audiences. When Autry was late for a radio appearance in 1933, the station happily played his record until he arrived and seamlessly picked up the melody, with listeners blissfully unaware of the transition.[110]

The production team behind the record were aware that its sound and sentiment would strike the nation's heartstrings at exactly the right moment. A&R man Art Satherely recalled later on, albeit with the benefit of hindsight, that the song was 'what the people wanted to hear at that time'.[111] ARC did not allow multiple labels to release the record, as was common practice at the time, because the company wanted exclusivity on what they predicted would be a hit. In Stephanie Vander Wel's assessment, even the tune's simple harmonic progression and pentatonic melody imbued a sense of nostalgia to the tune, which,

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[106] The plot of *Tumbling Tumbleweeds* is centred around Autry's character returning to his hometown to find his aged father murdered: Joseph Kane, dir., *Tumbling Tumbleweeds* (Republic Pictures, 1935). The same year the song featured in a sci-fi-cowboy film starring Autry: Otto Brower, dir., *The Phantom Empire* (Mascot Pictures, 1935).
[107] Jimmie Long and Gene Autry, 'That Silver-Haired Daddy of Mine' (Chicago: M.M. Cole Publishing, 1932)
[108] Miss Nellie Mills requested Missouri radio station WEW play the song to honour her father's 72nd birthday: 'Tuque Community', *Warrenton Banner* [Warrenton, Missouri], 6 January 1933, 3; 'Christian Church Honors Father's Day', *The Times* [Munster, Indiana], 18 June 1932, 5; *Hamilton Evening Journal* [Hamilton, Ohio], 18 June 1932, 5. For the history of Father's Day and the underlying anxieties about fatherhood and masculinity that caused its creation in the early twentieth century, see Ralph LaRossa, *The Modernization of Fatherhood: A Social and Political History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 172-182; Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Consumer Rites: The Buying & Selling of American Holidays* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), 245-274.
[109] 'Old Hayloft', *Standy By!*, 7 November 1936, 19.
[110] 'Gene Autry Is Author Of Best Selling Song', *Marshall News Messenger* [Marshall, Texas], 14 October 1935, 8; 'Radiodditties', *Radio Guide*, 15 January 1933, 22.
[111] Holly George-Warren, *Public Cowboy No. 1: The Life and Times of Gene Autry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 74.

coupled with the lyrics, acknowledged 'the fragility of 1930s rural culture and masculinity'.[112] The older male patriarch of the 'Silver Haired Daddy' is as a model of correct appropriate moral behaviour for the care-free Autry and other young wayward men. Promotion for the record in the South stressed the appeal of its confessional message. A newspaper advertisement in Paducah, Kentucky, explained to readers that they would enjoy the record because 'It is true to life. If you want to hear a record that will make you stop and think, hear this one'.[113] Another reason for the popularity of the song is that it provided a different image of old age to those found in discourses over the issue of social security in the early 1930s. Whereas pension advocates presented the inherent weakness of older men to attain sympathy of congressmen and lobbyists, 'Silver Haired Daddy' almost militarised old age in its depiction of an old man 'Bravely fighting the battle of time' and weathering 'life's sorrow'. Nevertheless, the song also conformed to the idea that old age was a period of life defined by a resignation to the ravages of time. Ultimately, Autry wishes that his father's wrinkles and silver hair would disappear.

Between 1930 and 1935, Autry's persona as southern mountaineer was 'westernised' into a cowboy singer of the prairies, and, arguably, this western topography was also laid onto 'Silver Haired Daddy'.[114] Other songs about elderly cowboys nevertheless differed subtly from those about fathers in the Appalachian Mountains. For example, in the Tune Wranglers' 'Ride On, Old-Timer, Ride On' (Bluebird B-6403) from 1936, the last journey on a horse becomes a metaphor for the latter stages of life of a grey-haired cowboy of the Texas plains. Southerners, cashing in on westernised old-time music, also sang of old pioneers. The protagonist of Jimmie Davis' 1940 record 'Old Timer' (Decca 5813) is 'weary of fighting battles with the redskins' but is told by the Louisianan singer that 'cowboys never cry'. The ways ageing disturbed expectations of masculinity in the West were inseparable

[112] Stephanie Vander Wel, 'The Lavender Cowboy and The She Buckaroo: Gene Autry, Patsy Montana, and Depression-Era Gender Roles', *Musical Quarterly* 95, no. 2/3 (2012): 217-218.
[113] *Paducah Sun-Democrat* [Paducah, Kentucky], 17 June 1931, 11.
[114] Wel, 'The Lavender Cowboy and The She Buckaroo', 218-219.

from a whole mythology of manly cowboys, and a set of anxieties about the end of frontier life that, if distinct from those about the coming end of traditional southern life, nevertheless ran parallel to them.[115]

The title of Floyd Skillern's 'My Old Fashioned Dad' (ARC unissued) from 1937 played with an image of aged fathers that can be found in all these records: as figures who embodied 'old-fashioned' ways, a phrase that often stood in for more tough, agrarian, and patriarchal attitudes. What is unclear is why most of these songs were sung from the perspectives of loving sons and not doting daughters. Perhaps hearing a young woman sing about the failing health of an aged father may have been perceived as emasculating and a challenge to patriarchal power dynamics. Another more inexplicable absence are race records about elderly fatherhood. By contrast, the 1929 fiddle instrumental 'Old Dad' (Gennett 7034) by Frank Jenkins' Pilot Mountaineers cashed in the association between old patriarchs and old-time music merely in its title alone. In one notable exception, 'Dad's Blues' (OKeh 8522, 1927), blues singer Sylvester Weaver reverses the narrational flow of most elderly father songs: Weaver laments that he is 'getting old and gray' and regrets the behaviour of his philandering son.

Grandmaw and Grandpaw

Like songs about elderly parents, those about grandparents had their roots in sentimentalism for the family in popular culture of the late nineteenth century. Some 'grandmother songs' from the 1930s, such as Johnny Marvin's 'Grandma's Rockin' Chair' (Decca rejected), Frank Luther's 'Grandmother's Bible' (Victor 23706), and Martin & Arthur Rose's 'Take Me Home To My Grandma' (Conqueror 8341), expressed similar

[115] Other examples include Carson Robinson's 'Howdy, Old-Timer' (OKeh 45270, 1929) and Roy Rogers' 'Old Pioneer' (Vocalion 04051, 1938), in which the pace and instrumentation of the song, in Raymond E. White's analysis, sounds like a 'slow-moving wagon train' nearing the end of its journey: Raymond E. White, *King of the Cowboys, Queen of the West: Roy Rogers and Dale Evans* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 51.

themes to those about aged mothers. When Dock Walsh wishes in his 1926 song 'In the Pines' (Columbia 15094-D) that he had taken the advice of his grandmother, rather than ended up lost and poverty-stricken, it is easy to substitute an aged mother in her place. Nevertheless, for the southern diaspora in particular, images of grandparents 'back home' embodied an even more potent sense of surety and stability that helped soothe the flux and flurry of modern life. In 'Way Down in Arkansas', homesick feelings for the state are intimately tied to great-grandparents:

> That's where my Great-Grandma,
> First met up with my Great-Grandpa.
> Well, they settled down together,
> How they loved each other,
> Way down in Arkansas.

Although the song was recorded as a novelty song by the Victor Band in 1916 (Victor 35635), and by the Hoosier Hot Shots in 1940 (Conqueror 9581), the version by Tennessean bluesman Hambone Willie Newbern (OKeh 8693) from 1929 is imbued with a serious pathos that he perhaps drew from his several years on the road with a travelling medicine show.[116] In Frank Hutchison's version of 'Cumberland Gap' (OKeh 45570) from the same year, one of the first things the homesick singer plans to do on returning to the iconic Appalachian valley is catch up with his 'grandma' and 'grandpap'. Big Bill Broonzy in 'Grandma's Farm' (Gennett unissued), recorded one year later, used the predictable life on his grandmother's southern farm as a simile for his own predictability in dealing with the other sex: 'Just as sure as a rabbit plays on your grandma's farm / I'm tired of stuff that you been carrying on'.

[116] Newbern was actually from Mississippi and not Arkansas, but likely found such material popular when he went on tent show tours to different cities across the region. Detail about Newbern's life come from Yank Ranchell, a musician who played with him in the interwar period: Richard Congress, *Blues Mandolin Man: The Life and Music of Yank Rachell* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 22-24. Songs that depicted great-grandparents were relatively indistinguishable in their content to those about grandparents such as Gid Tanner's 'Grandpapa's Pa' (Columbia unissued, 1927) or Zora Layman's 'Great Grandma' (Decca 12022, 1934).

Grandparents were obvious temporal touchstones for particular historical shifts. In December 1929, just as the Depression was beginning to hit already hard-pressed southern farmers, Dutch Coleman recorded 'Granny Get Your Hair Cut' (Vocalion 5391) in which he blamed the falling price of cotton on the shortening of skirts and uses the figure of a grandmother dressed up like a young flapper to show the supposed 'absurdity' of the newer fashion styles:

> In eighteen hundred and ninety-two,
> The women wore their dresses down to the top of the shoe.
> Nineteen hundred and twenty-three,
> They went to wearin' 'em up above their knee.
>
> So Granny get your hair cut, paint your face and shine,
> Granny get your hair cut short like mine.
> If you want to kick high, have a big time,
> Granny get your hair cut short like mine.
>
> Now let me tell you ladies and let me tell you straight,
> You better make 'em longer before it's too late.
> 'Cause there's one thing about it and it's not no joke,
> If you don't make 'em longer, why the farmer's goin' broke.

More banal generational shifts were associated with grandparents. Buck Nation's 'Granddad's Cuspidor' (Decca 5081) from 1935 focused on an object that listeners would have associated with older generations, as cigarettes and chewing gum slowly began to replace chewing tobacco, and as spittoons became uncouth following campaigns from etiquette and hygiene advocates to remove them from public life following the 1918 influenza pandemic.[117] Old characters were useful for satirising both the dangers of modern technologies, and the futility of older generations who tried to adapt to them. In 1926, at the same moment Henry Ford was inspiring a revival around old fiddlers, Vernon Dalhart

[117] M. Martini et al., 'The Spanish Influenza Pandemic: A Lesson from History 100 Years after 1918', *Journal of Preventive Medicine and Hygiene* 60, no. 1 (29 March 2019): 64-67. Many would have associated the spittoon with the elderly simply because hypersalivation is a common medical effect of ageing: Christina H. Smith et al., 'Effect of Aging on Stimulated Salivary Flow in Adults', *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* 61, no. 5 (2013): 805-808.

recorded ‘Old Bill Moser’s Ford’ (Columbia 15077-D) about an old man who foolishly buys a Ford car and crashes it.

Perhaps the most popular song about grandfatherhood, ‘Grandfather’s Clock’, reflected the fascinations of the 1870s when it was written, namely the interest in machine-powered clocks and their effect on conceptions of time and modernity. Yet its simple message concerning the inevitability of time and ageing resonated well into the twentieth century, with numerous race and old-time artists recording the song just as the South followed the rest of the nation into the clock-powered era. Put simply, many records consolidated an array of feelings about place and time and packed them into the figure of the grandparent.[118]

Although most songs were deferential, even reverential towards elderly parents, some trivialised or were derogatory towards grandparents by depicting them as drunks, frivolous, promiscuous, and violent. In 1937, bluesman Kokomo Arnold sang in ‘Grandpa Got Drunk’ (Decca 7319) of a ‘Grandpapa’ who makes his ‘Grandmama’ mad with his drunkenness and overspending. In 1928, Ramblin’ Thomas disclosed in ‘Jig Head Blues’ (Paramount 12708) that his drinking habits were inherited from his grandfather and grandmother, who drank whiskey and gin respectively. Quite serious medical and social issues relating to alcoholism were given humorous twists in both Wyzee Hamilton’s ‘Grandfather’s Liver (Ain’t What It Used To Wuz)’ (Gennett 6448) from 1927, and Clayton

[118] Old-time artists who recorded the song include the Carolina Buddys (Decca 5142, 1935), Fred L. Jeske (Paramount 3288, 1931), and the Shelton Brothers (Decca 5739, 1939). Race record versions include those by Tom and Roy (Bluebird B-5073, 1933) and the Golden Gate Jubilee Quartet (General Sound unnumbered, radio transcription for General Electric, c. 1943). For a thorough analysis of the appeal of ‘clock songs’ in the late nineteenth century, and a history of ‘Grandfather’s Clock’ and its subsequent parodies and ‘sequels’, see Jon W. Finson, *The Voices That Are Gone: Themes in Nineteenth-Century American Popular Song* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 124-133. For a history of clock-based time consciousness in the South, and its racialised ties to slavery and the wider plantation labour system, see Mark Michael Smith, *Mastered by the Clock: Time, Slavery, and Freedom in the American South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 153-177.

McMichen's 'Please Don't Sell My Pappy No More Rum' (Decca 5601) from 1938.[119] Cajun artists recorded similar songs about drunk elderly men, such as Clemo Breaux's 1928 record 'La Veux Soulard Et Sa Femme (The Old Drunkard And His Wife)' (Columbia 15301-D) and the Jolly Boys of Lafayette's 'Old Man Crip' (Decca 5431) from 1937.

There were medical and cultural reasons for this association between grandparents, or the aged generally, and alcoholism. Medical research suggests alcohol consumption not only causes premature ageing, but also exaggerates physical signs of age, meaning often alcoholics appear 'older' than they actually are.[120] Ironically, the generally accepted view in the early twentieth century was that alcohol was a useful and necessary tonic for soothing age-related maladies and countering visible signs of ageing, a medical belief reflected in the contemporary saying that 'wine is the milk of old age'.[121] During prohibition, alcohol was more easily accessible for the elderly than the general population. In 1922, the American Medical Association, concluded that liquor was vital to the treatment of an array of conditions, including 'old age'.[122]

The aged also constituted a significant demographic of bootleggers. As J. Anne Funderburg notes, a surprising number of older women illegally sold wine, beer, and moonshine to make ends meet. For example, when the 83-year-old Rosa Fontana from New Orleans was caught bootlegging, she initially defended herself to police authorities by claiming she made medicinal wine for her aged husband, and later confessed she committed

[119] A similar characterisation is heard on Uncle Dave Macon's 'Old Man's Drunk Again' (Vocalion 15441, 1926) in which an old drunk causes havoc across a small town.
[120] For the latest research on the links between alcohol and ageing, see Alexis Kuerbis et al., *Alcohol and Aging: Clinical and Public Health Perspectives* (New York: Springer, 2017).
[121] Temperance campaigners regularly contested the 'generally accepted view' of the time that 'wine is the milk of old age': e.g. T. N. Kelynack, 'Medical Use of Alcohol', *Scientific Temperance Journal* 26, no. 1 (1917): 24.
[122] This was a reversal of their 1917 statement that alcohol held no medicinal value. In 1922, two years following the enactment of prohibition laws, and amidst a wider 'prescription boom', many medical practitioners began to realise the economic niche they could exploit by selling prescribed alcohol. For the medical establishment during prohibition, see Daniel Okrent, *Last Call: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010), 195.

the crime because she was left penniless due to her husband's declining health. Similarly, the 63-year-old Lena Severance of Crawfordsville, Florida began illegally selling beer to keep her family afloat when her ageing husband became ill.[123] Ultimately, for the elderly during Prohibition, the option to make a living working from home was not only a lifeline for many older men and women, but a relatively feasible career option compared to jobs involving tough physical labour. While many real-life bootleggers were women, those depicted on old-time records tended to be men. In his 1927 song, 'Old Whisker Bill, The Moonshiner' (Brunswick 145), Buell Kazee describes an archetypal whiskered old bootlegger. Fiddlin' John Carson recorded several skits in which he played an old moonshiner in arguments with his daughter Rosa Lee Carson. Before the music begins in the instrumental 'Who Bit The Wart Off Grandma's Nose' (OKeh 45448, 1929), Rosa Lee (known, ironically, as 'Moonshine Kate') tells her old father that he should get out to work instead of making moonshine.

Perhaps related to this association between grandparents and liquor were those that situated a party, dance, or 'frolic' in the grandparental home. The juxtaposition in the Corn Shuckers' 'Grandpapa's Frolic' (Gennett 6546), the Kentucky Jazz Babies' 'Old Folks Shake' (Victor V38616), and the Bar-X Cowboys' 'Let's All Go Down To Grandpa's' (Bluebird B-8930) between elders and frivolity stressed just how fun a party or dance was; even grandpa and grandma, implicitly interpreted as physically weak and past the age of partying, could get into the spirit. In 'Grandpa Said "Let's Suzie-Q"' (Vocalion 03455) from 1936, Lil Johnson describes a diverse range of individuals enthralled by the eponymous dance, including one disabled individual and an elderly couple. In a 1928 recording, Blind Willie McTell described how everybody he knew had the seemingly desirable 'Statesboro

[123] These cases and more are discussed in J. Anne Funderburg, *Bootleggers and Beer Barons of the Prohibition Era* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2014), 284-285. For the South during Prohibition, see Joe Coker, *Liquor in the Land of the Lost Cause: Southern White Evangelicals and the Prohibition Movement* (Louisville, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2007); Ann-Marie Szymanski, 'Beyond Parochialism: Southern Progressivism, Prohibition, and State-Building', *Journal of Southern History* 69, no. 1 (2003): 107-136.

Blues' (Victor 38001), and even 'grandma and grandpa had them too'. 'Bring It On Home To Grandma', recorded by various race and old-time artists, presented a similar picture of a raucous grandmother.[124] Many up-tempo, danceable instrumentals, both race and old-time, used ironic titles that referred to grandparents, including the hot jazz of Johnny Dodds' 'Grandma's Blues' (OKeh 8533) and the fiddle tunes of 'Granny Will Your Dog Bite' (Floyd County Ramblers, Victor 23759) and 'Old Granny Rattle-Trap' (Uncle Am Stuart, Vocalion 14888). Paradoxically, a song like 'Old Folks Better Go To Bed', recorded by both the Scottdale String Band (45173) and Ford & Grace (45237) for OKeh in 1927, played with the opposite idea: the frivolity of a party was so intense that the older contingents would need to retire to bed.

In direct contrast to impotence blues songs, and more in line with age masquerade, some records highlighted the surprising sexuality of grandparents. In the 1929 song 'The Old Folks Started It' (Victor V38547), after much sexual innuendo that appealed, intentionally or not, to longstanding ideas of hypersexualised black culture, the black singer Millie Wallace implies that little has changed in the battle of the sexes over the generations:

> Talk about your women wearing your strapless skirts,
> Your grandma does the strut in your grandpa's shirt.
> The old folks started it the young folks got it,
> Everybody's crazy about the darktown strut.

In 1931, Memphis Minnie dedicated a whole song, 'Grandpa and Grandma Blues' (Vocalion 1601), to the sexual relations of two grandparents:

> Grandma got something, make grandpa break his pipe,
> And grandpa got something, keep grandma awake all night

[124] Race record versions include Richard M. Jones (Decca 7064, 1935); Jimmie Noone (Vocalion 1584, 1930); Mississippi Mud Mashers (Bluebird B5899, 1935); Lovin' Sam Theard (Brunswick unissued, 1930); Jim Jackson (Vocalion unissued, 1929); Ted Mays and His Band (Bluebird B7206, 1937). Old-time act Shelly Lee Alley and His Alley Cats also recorded a version (Vocalion 04201, 1938).

The pipe is a recurring phallic metaphor throughout the song, with the grandfather at once faithful to his spouse (he 'ain't smoked his pipe' without his wife), while simultaneously promiscuous and threatening ('With that pipe in his hand, he'll find you everywhere you go'). In the last stanza, the grandfather's pipe breaks, implying the old man's insatiable libido has finally dissipated. The representation of the hypersexual elder was intended to be comedic. Nevertheless, this combination of virility and debility reflected some of the ambiguities about masculinity of the era, some black women toyed with through the medium of blues performance.

Some songs depicted grandfathers and older men as violent, hypermasculine figures. In 'Great Grand Dad', recorded by several old-time artists, the narrator claims times have changed in the Southwest since the days of their pioneering, Indian-fighting great-grandfather.[125] Whereas aged mothers and grandmothers were associated with bibles, grandfathers were linked to decidedly violent objects, as in Al Bernard's 'My Grandpappy's Gun' (Brunswick 260) or Frank Marvin's 'Old Man Duff' (Victor 23553), in which the titular character is as 'tough as a man can be' who sleeps on broken glass, chokes policemen, and drinks gasoline for tea. However, grandmothers occasionally got in on the violent action. In 'Black and Blue Blues' (Victor V-40290), Blind Alfred Reed's grandmother-in-law comes to help the care of his sick child but ends up bruising the singer for his misbehaviour.

An aged figure of notable 'masculine' strength is the focus of the Johnson Brothers' 1928 record 'Old Timer From Caroliner' (Victor 21532), a mountain pioneer who fought both Yankees and Native Americans. The Carolinian's violent life experiences supposedly legitimise his threat at the end the song that 'you better not be fussing with me.' More than a romanticisation of a past manliness, however, the song was also a humorous critique of the elderly 'tall tale' teller who attempts to claw back a sense of manhood in their later years by

[125] Recordings include those by John I. White (Banner 6561, 1929), Skyland Scotty (Blue Bird B-5357, 1934) and Harmonica Bill (Champion S-16399, 1932).

making-up adventurous stories about their past. Much like performers in age masquerade, the 'Old Timer From Caroliner' makes outlandish claims to have been friendly with Buffalo Bill, Daniel Boone, Jesse James, *and* Robert E. Lee. Still, for all these hypermasculine grandfather songs there were others, such as Bobby Gregory's 'Who Threw Mush In Grandpa's Whiskers?' (OKeh 45473), that drew on notions of older people as senile or even imbecilic.

Depictions of grandparents as drunk, frivolous, hypersexual, violent, or imbecilic figures played into longstanding ideas about the inherent primitiveness of southerners, particularly blacks but also, to a lesser extent, white 'hillbillies'. The reason why grandparents became associated with these ideas is contextualised by the rise of American eugenics. In the *Buck v. Bell* Supreme Court decision of 1927, the Virginia State Colony for Epileptics and Feebleminded was granted permission to sterilize the 18-year-old Carrie Buck, because she, and her daughter and 52-year-old mother, were deemed 'feeble-minded' and 'promiscuous'. As Associate Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. remarked in his infamous ruling, 'Three generations of imbeciles are enough.' The generational thinking at the core of eugenics ideology may have contributed to the ways Americans perceived poor, rural grandparents, reimagining them as the genetic sources of a litany of inherited racial, physical, or mental 'impurities'.[126] This is not to suggest that these relatively harmless songs about grandparents were cultural manifestations of eugenics theory, especially as many of these southern musicians were likely unaware of these contexts. Nevertheless, in a subtle way at least, these records fed into a wider eugenics-influenced 'common-sense' that increasingly interpreted older generations of poor southerners, both white and black, as the

[126] For the *Buck v. Bell* 274 U.S. 200 (1927) decision and the history of American eugenics, see Adam Cohen, *Imbeciles: The Supreme Court, American Eugenics, and the Sterilization of Carrie Buck* (London: Penguin Books, 2017); Paul A. Lombardo, *Three Generations, No Imbeciles: Eugenics, the Supreme Court, and Buck v. Bell* (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008); Harry Bruinius, *Better for All the World: The Secret History of Forced Sterilization and America's Quest for Racial Purity* (New York: Vintage Books USA, 2007). For the way these developments influenced southern modernist literature, see Jude Riley, 'Idiot-Brained South': Intellectual Disability and Eugenics in Southern Modernism' (PhD dissertation, Northumbria University, 2015).

carriers of ‘bad genes’.

Pension Blues

The passing of the Social Security Act in 1935 raised public consciousness about the aged as a distinct demographic group with its own particular needs. To varying degrees, the percolation of ideas about old age in popular and political culture probably influenced the recording of all the songs mentioned in this chapter. However, only a few race and old-time records directly referenced the pension system that the Act produced.[127] The relative dearth of records about pensions is notable given it was not unheard of for southern artists to make politically charged records.[128] One reason for this conspicuous absence is that the implementation of Social Security was a relatively slow process until the postwar era and few southern states had pension systems in place between the Wars, aside for those for Confederate veterans. Furthermore, agricultural and domestic workers were excluded from Social Security, meaning many southerners, and particularly African Americans, simply had no stake in old age pensions until further reforms in the 1960s.[129] Nevertheless, the few records about pensions at least provide a narrow window into southern perspectives on Social Security and other pension plans in the 1930s.

The complex history of the song ‘When Our Old Age Pension Check Comes To Our Door’ encapsulates some of the wider political and cultural wrangling over the thorny issue of pensions. Manny Stone, a member of the organisation behind the Old Age Revolving Pensions Plan, otherwise known as the Townsend Plan, wrote the song in 1934. Sung from

[127] The two programmes of the Act that most directly concerned the aged were Old Age Insurance (OAI) and Old Age Assistance (OAA). Although scholars dispute the differences between these programmes and their impacts, most contemporary Americans tended to refer to these provisions as ‘pensions’.
[128] African Americans in the 1930s and 1940s, for example, recorded over three hundred blues songs about President Roosevelt and the New Deal, but seemingly only one specifically about pensions: Guido van Rijn, *Roosevelt’s Blues: African-American Blues and Gospel Songs on FDR* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997), xvi.
[129] See Mary Poole, *The Segregated Origins of Social Security: African Americans and the Welfare State* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 12–27.

the perspective of an aged man, the lyrics simultaneously promotes the real benefits and freedoms of the Townsend Plan, while humorously predicting some more outlandish changes for the lot of the aged. The joy of the arrival of the pension check, the song claimed, would remove the dread of the poorhouse and the loneliness of 'dear old grandma'. Yet it also predicted that a financially secure 'grandma' would get a date every night, while every 'girl will choose a grandpa to adore'. The song became something of a theme song for the movement and sang in Townsend Clubs across the country. Compared to the seriousness of other cultural initiatives of the Townsend movement, such as its own magazine, the lyrics are remarkably light-hearted about the sole cause of the movement.[130]

The Diamond D Boys were the first group to adopt the song. Hailing from Wilmington, California, the base for Townsend Club No. 1, the band performed it over KGER in Long Beach, the home of Dr. Edward Townsend, the founder and figurehead of the movement.[131] The song became a theme song for Townsend clubs around the country. In February 1935, printed editions of the lyrics and ukulele chords were even sent to congressmen across the nation to 'sweep the nation by song'. 'Music, it is hoped', the Townsend press release read, 'will sooth the savage critics.'[132] The Sons Of The Pioneers, another California band and innovators of 'country and western', recorded the first version

[130] Although Edwin Amenta explores other aspects of Townsend Club culture, the song is missing from his monograph on the movement: Edwin Amenta, *When Movements Matter: The Townsend Plan and the Rise of Social Security* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006), 40–50.
[131] 'Diamond D Cowboys, Radio Artists, to Be Featured on Program', *Wilmington Daily Press Journal* [Wilmington California], 28 November 1934, 3; 'Diamond D Cowboys Bid For Fame Over Radio Station KMPC', *Wilmington Daily Press Journal*, 2 March 1935, 3. Ernest Heberlein, secretary of the Indianapolis Symphonic Choir, performed a version of the song after a Townsend talk in Indianapolis: 'Townsend Outlines Age Pension Plan', *Indianapolis Star*, 9 December 1934, 15.
[132] There were local and centralised efforts across Townsend clubs to write and rewrite other songs for the movement but, 'Old Age Pension Check' continuously proved the most popular. A rehashed version of the light music hit 'Just A Little Home For The Old Folks' (Victor 73878, 1932) by Jim Harkins and His Orchestra nearly became the Club anthem: 'Twin Lakes Old Age Pension Club Gaining Strength', *Santa Cruz Sentinel* [Santa Cruz, California], 18 December 1934, 2; *Wisconsin State Journal*, 8 February 1935, 3.

of the song in March 1935 (Decca 5432).[133] Their rendition centred on the stanzas with comedic imagery of pensioners and the country living in extravagance, with well-fed cats, bones for every dog, ice cream cones for every child, and steaks for every man. Although these purposefully exaggerated lyrics were intended to be humorous, they also reflected the ambitions of the Townsend Plan to tackle the worse effects of the Depression by inducing pensioners to spend their pensions on US consumer items. Yet the Sons of the Pioneers version focused more on the humorous lyrics than the serious ones. In their version, even the figure of the elderly mother-in-law, otherwise so derided in US culture, would be cared for through pension plans.

Consolidated Film Industries, who bought Decca during the Depression, hired the Sons of the Pioneers to perform the song in the 1935 picture, *The Old Homestead*. In the movie, elderly farmer Uncle Jed and his farmhand musician friends (the Sons of the Pioneers) reach the big-time, travelling from a nondescript rural location to a New York radio station, and playing 'Old Age Pension Check' for Jed's benefit.[134] Very quickly then, a record that began as a 'movement song' was repurposed as a humorous ditty on record and in a cinematic picture about an old-fashioned, elderly hillbilly. Despite this crass commercialisation, the record was still received as a political polemic. In a review of the release by a young John Hammond, the soon-to-be colossal figure of recorded American music noted with surprise that Decca 'has gone very topical in some of their latest hillbilly stuff, as witness the titles'.[135] As Hammond described how the Sons of the Pioneers 'bleated' the song it is fair to assume he thought little of their old-time stylings, but his mild interest in

[133] The record was also released at the same time in Australia (Decca Australia X1205) and the United Kingdom (Panachord 25874) with the spelling of 'Check' changed to 'Cheque'. Decca backed the record with 'Will You Love Me When My Hair Has Turned To Silver', indicating the label wished to emphasise the age theme. Incidentally, ARC, also owned by Consolidated Film Industries, recorded the Diamond D Boys' original version, just two days after the Sons of the Pioneers went into the Decca studio, but never issues the recording.
[134] William Nigh, dir., *The Old Homestead* (Liberty Pictures, 1935).
[135] John Hammond, 'Jazz Records in Review: British and Radio Programs, M. Panassie and Other Matters', *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 7 April 1935, 41.

the politics of old age in the song is foretelling of his later activism within and outside the music industry.[136]

Although Manny Stone, the Diamond D Boys, and the Sons of the Pioneers were all based in California, the song certainly reached the ears of southerners. In 1937, a reader from Greenback, Tennessee, wrote to *Stand By!* magazine asking other readers to send her lyrics for the song, and was willing to swap any song from her collection for a copy.[137] More significantly, Roy Acuff, star of the *Grand Ole Opry*, recorded his own interpretation in 1939 ('Old Age Pension Check', Vocalion/OKeh 05244). Acuff focused even more so on the humorous verses. With pensions, Acuff predicted, 'old maids' would feel comfortable telling their age as the everyday man would be more tempted to date a 'grandma' rather than a 'flapper'; drug stores and cosmetics firms would go bankrupt. Most poignantly, in an entirely new final verse, Acuff pointed an accusatory finger at politics:

> There's a man that turned this country upside-down,
> With his old age pension rumour going 'round,
> If you want in on the fun,
> Send your dime to Washington,
> And that old age pension man will be around.

It is unclear whether Acuff was referring to the obvious 'culprit' in Washington, namely Roosevelt and the federal government, or to Townsend. Leaders of the Townsend movement felt Social Security paled in comparison to their ambitious vision, so accelerated their efforts after 1935 and relocated their head office to the capital to coordinate their national campaign.[138] Whoever was the target of the song, Acuff's message was clear: pensions would break apart the social fabric as well as waste large amounts of taxpayers' money. Unscrupulous claimants, Acuff inferred, would have 'fun' with the generous pension checks off the back of the general public.

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[136] For Hammond's politics, see Dunstan Prial, *The Producer: John Hammond and the Soul of American Music* (London: Picador, 2007).
[137] 'Notes From The Music Library', *Stand By!*, 19 June 1937, 11.
[138] Amenta, *When Movements Matter*, 107-120.

'Old Age Pension Check' was an anomaly in Acuff's otherwise relatively apolitical musical repertoire.[139] Acuff remarked in a later interview that the recording was intended to be comedic rather than polemic:

> Some people resented the song, but it still sold well. Songs like this are not received one hundred percent. There are some words in it that are a little touchy for some people: 'Send your dime to Washington - get on relief.' It was more of a comedy song for me, but it was taken a little bit politically by some.[140]

Nine years after recording the song, however, Acuff stood as the Republican nominee in the Tennessee gubernatorial race, ironically with old age pensions as a significant plank of his policy platform. As he put it at one campaign event, 'Our old folks should be taken care of in their old age'.[141] Old people supposedly came up to Acuff to tell him how they were earning as little as $8 to $12 a month. 'I think we have been pretty stingy with our old folks', Acuff told audiences, 'The rest of us have gotten pay raises in the last few years and they deserve one, too.'[142] Generally, Acuff campaigned against federal tax hikes, but old age welfare was a notable, and cross-party, exception in Tennessean politics: Acuff's Democrat opponent and ultimate winner of the race, Gordon Browning, also campaigned to increase old age assistance.[143] Journalists seemingly did not pick up on the inconsistency between

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[139] This is not to say that the themes of tradition, family, God, manhood, womanhood, and the South in Acuff's songs did not have underlying political standpoints, but that he at least did not usually sing explicitly about political policy: John W. Rumble, liner notes for Roy Acuff, *Country & Western Classics - Roy Acuff,* (Time-Life Records TLCW-09, 1983).
[140] Acuff gave an alternative source for the song than that given here: 'I bought this number from a boy that lived in Knoxville, and as far as I know, he wrote it. I can't remember his name at the present time'. Acuff may have been mistaken about the song's authorship, or it may have been in the process of being passed around different publishers when he first came across it: Interview with Roy Acuff, Nashville, Tennessee, 8 September 1973, in Dorothy Horstman, *Sing Your Heart Out, Country Boy*, 220.
[141] H. B. Teeter, 'Speaker Portrays Acuff As "Bulwark" Against Isms', *Nashville Tennessean,* 6 October 1948, 18.
[142] Teachers' pension was a particularly prominent campaign issue. Acuff told his public 'Let's not devote all our attention to the younger and more active teachers and ignore those who have given their lives to the cause of education': Elizabeth Roe Schlappi, *Roy Acuff, the Smoky Mountain Boy* (New Orleans: Pelican Publishing, 1993), 197.
[143] H. B. Teeter, 'Mountain Troubadour, Serenades Browning', *Nashville Tennessean,* 3 October 1948, 6.

Acuff's position on pensions on his record and on the soap box. More generally, it is debateable whether Acuff was genuinely interested in winning the election, or whether his campaign was a shrewd career move for the *Opry* star.[144] Ultimately, while it is possible that Acuff radically changed his mind on the topic, it is more likely that his commitment to pensions was shaky at best, and just one dimension of a populist, if ultimately unsuccessful campaign.

As Peter La Chapelle has shown in a recent analysis of 'country music candidates', Acuff was not the only 'hillbilly' musician-turned-politician in the South to endorse pensions. In Texas, W. Lee 'Pappy' O'Daniel built his gubernatorial campaign on a pensions proposal which borrowed ideas from the Townsend Plan. Once in power, O'Daniel broadcast radio shows with old-time music interspersed with advice that listeners join his pension crusade. The governor even read out letters from purportedly 'suffering grandmas'. Unsurprisingly, several sympathetic 'ageing mother' songs, some O'Daniel-penned, could be heard through his *Doughboys and Hillbilly Boys* radio programmes, not least 'Thirty Bucks for Mamma', a direct appeal to his $30-a-month pension plan.[145] Significantly, the image of O'Daniel appealing via song to the elderly (or voters sympathetic to better pensions) was one of ridicule outside of Texas. In an editorial in an Oregon newspaper on southern 'crackpot' politicians, editors argued that the fact that O'Daniel could convince his electorate to elect him governor in 1940 by singing 'Thirty Bucks for Mamma' and promising supposedly undeliverable pension plans provided a 'fine commentary on the intelligence of Texas'.[146] For those outside the South, notions of southerners' all-consuming

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[144] Much of the media portrayed Acuff as more interested in promoting himself and the *Opry* than political change. The *Tennessean* noted cynically that Acuff referenced the *Opry* sixteen times in a speech at a campaign event in Franklin. However, newspapers like the *Tennessean* focused on his hillbilly persona and unfairly essentialised his manifesto to 'following the Ten Commandments and the Golden rule', despite Acuff taking remarkably clear stances on his proposed policies: 'Acuff Boosts "Opry", Reece in Williamson', *Nashville Tennessean*, 3 October 1948, 6.

[145] O'Daniel never recorded the song, but it was a popular tune on-air and at public events: Chapelle, *I'd Fight the World*: *A Political History of Old-Time, Hillbilly, and Country Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019) 101-104.

[146] 'Why Crackpots Win', *Capital Journal* [Salem, Oregon], 5 July 1941, 4.

deference to age, and their love of old-time music, were markers of their gullibility and idiocy.

Significantly, there were ties between these pension-pushing performer-politicians and patent medicine companies interested in the grey or 'greying' dollar. That O'Daniel was close friends with Carr Collins, the president of Crazy Water Crystals, and appeared on radio shows sponsored by the company that produced 'energising' salt product potentially explains why the governor campaigned for an extra thirty dollars in the purses of elderly mothers. Likewise, Dudley J. LeBlanc, who led the initial Louisiana pension campaign before Huey Long adopted its basic principles, had a company that sold Hadacol, a B vitamin that combatted age conditions from cataracts to rheumatism. Acuff sold the cure-all Mocoton Tonic on medicine shows in the 1930s and later appeared on stages with LeBlanc's Hadacol Caravan country music shows in the 1950s.[147]

As with Acuff, there were frequent inconsistences between what country music politicians said about old age and what they sang. Jimmie Davis, the same singer who in 1932 had comically warned of the vanity of older Americans who combated age with monkey glands, ran on a pension platform for Louisiana Governor in 1943. During his tenure, Davis did secure many retirement benefits for elderly state workers, and regularly used his concerts/rallies to push his pension agenda. As La Chapelle argues, 'If one were to define the politics of the performer-politicians emerging out of the still-youthful hillbilly industry, support for old-age pensions and similar schemes for the elderly formed the most solid, consistent core'.[148] The frequently self-serving use of the pensions issue by performer-politicians like Acuff, O'Daniel, and Davis reflected a wider ambiguity in the relationship

[147] Mocoton Tonic supposedly cured 'dyspepsia, sick headaches, constipation, indigestion, pain in the side, back and limbs, torpid liver': Elizabeth Roe Schlappi, *Roy Acuff, the Smoky Mountain Boy* (New Orleans: Pelican Publishing, 1993) 20-22. Peter La Chapelle, *I'd Fight the World*, 106-109.

[148] Chapelle suggests that, alongside pensions, an opposition to poll tax and a populist appeal against the dominant 'political machines' of states such as Texas, Louisiana and Tennessee were also key ingredients to hillbilly politicians: Chapelle, *I'd Fight the World*, 107.

between southern politics and age welfare of the New Deal. Their mixed relationships with pensions were akin to Georgia Governor Eurith D. Rivers, who was elected in 1936 on a New Deal ticket but had little stake in the political project. One advisor recalled that after his election, Rivers rang them up to say 'I got elected because I said I was going to provide for an old-age pension and a lot of other welfare programs, but I don't know a damn thing about it.'[149]

The Shelton Brothers' 'Old Age Pension Blues' (Decca 5700), recorded in Houston in 1939, expressed similar animosities towards pensions as Acuff's 'Old Age Pension Check':

> I've got an uncle in Washington,
> He says my working days are done.
> He says he has more money than he can use,
> And he gave me the old age pension blues.

The lyrics give insight into a whole conservative outlook towards federal intervention in the care of the aged: here, the source of the 'blues' for a younger generation are a large-scale welfare programme that enabled elders to live off the taxes of the young. Racial preconceptions also shaped such beliefs about Social Security. The *Jackson Daily News* reported in 1935 that 'The average [white] Mississippian can't imagine himself chipping in to pay pensions for able-bodied Negroes to sit around in idleness on front galleries, supporting all their kinfolks on pensions, while cotton and corn crops are crying for workers to get them out of the grass.'[150]

The Shelton Brothers' song, however, gives insight into a particularly Texan perspective of Social Security. The first Social Security Administration field office in the country was in Austin. 'Old Age Pension Blues' was recorded only a few months after a local newspaper in Longview, Texas, the hometown of the band, published a photograph of

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[149] Anthony J. Badger, *New Deal / New South: An Anthony J. Badger Reader* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2007), 41.
[150] *Jackson Daily News*, 2 June 1935, quoted in Martha H. Swain, *Pat Harrison: The New Deal Years* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1978), 83.

pension offices across state, in its words, 'swamped' with the first applicants for old age pensions.[151] Political attitudes in Texas were typically fearful of how Social Security would be implemented in the state. James V. Allred, Governor of Texas for much of the New Deal years, expressed a scepticism many Texans felt towards federal funding in debates with the Texas Legislature. A primary concern was that no national programme could provide the funds needed for a jurisdiction the size of Texas. In 1936, Allred told his colleagues that 'the taxpayers of this State are faced with a picture so dark it can hardly be painted in words'. Religious thinking about elders could be twisted to legitimise this perspective. 'We want to take care of our needy aged', Allred explained, 'but it is another thing when it comes to taking money from industrious and thrifty people to give to people who do not need it … [I think we will] encourage children to be unmindful of the Biblical admonition to honor our fathers and our mothers.'[152] Ultimately, pensions came into force, but these underlying tensions remained in state politics and popular culture and came to fore when the first checks were handed out.

At the end of the song, the young narrator (after explaining how a 'redheaded woman' can both make an old man young again *and* keep a young man from turning grey) then realises the benefits of old age pensions for himself:

> Come all you people young and old,
> I'm right here to get you told.
> I got a letter in today,

[151] 'Aged Crowd To Pension Office In Texas', *Longview News-Journal* [Longview, Texas], 6 June 1939, 1. There was considerable delay between the passing of the Social Security Act in 1935 and its implantation across different states, but Texas was one of the first to have a pension office: 'SSA's First Field Office', Social Security Administration, accessed 10 December 2018, https://www.ssa.gov/history/aaustin.html.

[152] James V. Allred, *Legislative Messages of Hon. James V. Allred, Governor Of Texas, 1935-39*, 1939, 107, University of North Texas Libraries, Portal to Texas History, available at www.texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth3899, accessed 5 December 2018. Texans nevertheless had a varied and diverse range of opinions about the New Deal, not least Governor W. Lee 'Pappy' O'Daniel, who suggested that Texans should embrace the influx of funds from New Deal programmes if other states were going to do the same: Roger Biles, *The South and the New Deal* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006), 58; Keith Joseph Volanto, *Texas, Cotton, And The New Deal* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2005)

I don't have to work on the WPA.

The stanza works hard to simultaneously reinforce derogatory notions of southerners' 'natural' tendency towards laziness, criticise the exploitability of Social Security, and disparage the Work Projects Administration (the renamed Works Progress Administration) for doling out 'pointless' jobs to young men. The song was part of a larger repertoire of the group, including 'How Times Have Changed' (Decca 5690) and 'Parking Meter Blues' (Decca 5811) from the same year, that Jeffrey J. Lange suggests gave 'humorous glimpses into the urban hillbilly's ambivalence towards sociocultural developments pushing southerners into modernity'.[153] As musical critics of modernisation, their comedic take on old age pensions was somewhat paradoxical: the group upheld traditional values while chastising programmes that provided much-needed relief to elders, the logical choice of stewards for the traditions they upheld. This paradox was also expressed sonically: the Shelton Brothers were exponents of the new modes of Western Swing in their instrumentation (electric mandola, pedal-slide) and musical aesthetic (intricate jazz-inflected solo) but did not entirely abandon their string band approach.

One of the few African American groups to reference pensions was the Texan combo Dusky Dailey And His Band, who recorded the barrelhouse boogie-woogie 'Pension Blues' (Vocalion 04977) in Dallas in 1939. In the short song, vocalist Tommy Hicks expresses the dilemma facing aged claimants, particularly black ones:

> Got the pension blues and I really need your help,
> I been here so long, I just 'bout lose myself.
> I was born June the first in eighteen seventy-four,
> It's no need in staying here long when you're so doggone poor.

In the lyric 'been around so long', Hicks even draws parallels between the longevity associated with ageing and the experience of waiting in long queues for pension checks. As Guido van Rijn argues, the protagonist asks for help to prove that he is really 65 years old so

[153] Jeffrey J. Lange, *Smile When You Call Me a Hillbilly: Country Music's Struggle for Respectability, 1939-1954* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 51.

he can claim his pension.[154] Of the approximately half of African Americans who were eligible for Social Security, many would have struggled to provide the necessary proofs of age. A 1940 study of census data found that nonregistration of births was disproportionately common among ethnic minorities in the rural South: 30 percent of the 'nonwhite' southern population had no birth certificate, compared to 15 percent nationally. In 1948, *National Negro Health News* reported on the range of issues nonregistration presented for black public health and welfare, including the fact that birth certificate was the 'best proof of age for old-age pensions.'[155]

Conclusion

The broad themes that are repeated throughout this corpus of southern song - imaginings of a pastoral Old South, race and industrial relations, fragility and impotency, familial relations and attitudes towards the federal government's social welfare programme - reflect many of the real and perceived challenges facing the modernising New South of the early twentieth century. After the Second World War, songs about old age more or less went out of fashion when compared to the previous three decades, but some notable exceptions are worthy of mention. Some rock and roll numbers carried on the tradition of the image of grandparents ironically, such as Moon Mullican's 1953 take on how 'Grandpa Stole My Baby' (King 45-1244). Even more ironically, an elderly Carson Robinson, who had spent his early years writing and recording old-time music, including some about old age, recorded 'Rockin' And Rollin' With Grandmaw (On Saturday Night)' (MGM K12266) in 1956 as a last-ditch attempt to remain relevant. Meanwhile, southern vernacular musicians, and northern folk revivalists of southern styles, including Joe Glazer, Malvina Reynolds and Pete

[154] Rijn, *Roosevelt's Blues: African-American Blues and Gospel Songs on FDR*, 77.
[155] This 1940 study is referenced in 'Underregistration: A Negro Health Problem', *National Negro Health News* 16, no. 1 (March 1948): 9. For the lack of birth registration in southern states generally, see Shane Landrum, 'From Family Bibles to Birth Certificates: Young People, Proof of Age, and American Political Cultures, 1820-1915', in *Age in America: The Colonial Era to the Present*, ed. Corinne T. Field and Nicholas L. Syrett (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 131-132.

Seeger, wrote political songs about old age welfare which they used on labour strikes and marches.[156] It is unclear whether the complex political history of 'Old Age Pension Check' was known to the New Lost City Ramblers when they performed it just a short time before the upgrade to social security legislation in the Old Age Act of 1965.[157] More significantly, in the late 1950s 'Banjo' Bill Cornett, Representative of the 74th District of Kentucky, campaigned for free medical care for the aged and to raise pensions, and even played his composition 'Old Age Pension Blues' on the floor of the Kentucky Legislature. [158]

As R&B succeeded what was once called 'race music', similar themes of old age persisted, whether in Esther Phillips' steamy 1952 tribute to the older man, 'Aged And Mellow' (Federal 12078), or Wynonie Harris's swinging realisation in 1949 that 'I Feel That Old Age Comin' On' (backed by 'Grandma Plays the Numbers') (King 4267). While the more nostalgic and racially problematic songs about aged ex-slaves and a pastoral Old South tended to drop away as the Civil Rights Movement accelerated in the late 1950s and 1960s, it is significant that more recordings of 'Ol' Man River' by black artists were made during this period than in any other era.[159]

The songs discussed in this chapter do not always fall neatly into models of positive or negative visions of old age. Some records took a remarkably clear stance on how society did or should treat its aged, but this chapter shows how many were tangled in ambiguity and complexity. In general, these songs reflect the lives and concerns of the mostly young

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[156] For old age issues and the folk revival, see Simon H. Buck, 'Pete Seeger's Rainbow Quest: Televisual Old Age, Intergenerationalism, and US Folk Music', *The Sixties: A Journal of History, Politics and Culture* 12, no. 1 (2 January 2019): 69-94.
[157] Although, as record collectors, it is possible the band were aware of the irony of a group of progressive-minded folkies performing an anti-welfare song: New Lost City Ramblers, 'Old Age Pension Check', *Songs From The Depression* (Folkways FH 5264, 1959), LP.
[158] Cornett, who, incidentally, was influenced by and once met Uncle Dave Macon, believed the old age lien law confiscated the property of the aged poor. On Cornett's death in 1960, the Kentucky General Assembly passed a resolution memorialising 'the grand old man of the mountains': *The Messenger* [Madisonville, Kentucky], 14 January 1960, 1. A recording of 'Old Age Pension Blues' and John Cohen's biography of Cornett can be found on Various Artists, *Mountain Music of Kentucky,* (Folkways Records SFW40077, 1959), long play record.
[159] Decker, *Who Should Sing Ol' Man River?*, 8-10.

musicians who wrote and sang them rather than the actual experiences of the elderly. Occasionally, however, they echo the demographic, political flows of old age history. Alongside other depictions of age of the era, in the press, cinema, literature, and the arts, they add new colour to a portrait of age consciousness in the South from the 1920s to the 1940s. Most importantly, they represent a unique insight into a range of conceptions of age amongst southern women and African Americans, whose perspectives on age, as other chapters of this dissertation show, tended to be overshadowed by white and male interpretations of old age.

Chapter Five

The Noble Old: John and Alan Lomax, African American Music, and Old Age

On 22 June 1934, near New Iberia, Louisiana, the father-and-son folklorists John and Alan Lomax recorded Sam Ballard, otherwise known as 'Old Dad', singing five 'work songs' that he had sung as a railway labourer. On the recordings, the elderly African American's cracked voice struggles to reach the higher register of the melody, though a few fleeting notes cut through, suggesting he once held a powerful tenor voice. John informs the listener that Ballard had been a 'baby during the Civil War'.[1] The Lomaxes also took a photograph of Ballard sat sideways to the camera surrounded by darkness. His glistening white beard, the light reflecting off his bald head, and the etched lines on his face indicate that he is old. His workman's clothes indicate his social class, but he sits erect and stares determinedly off camera with an air of dignified, rustic nobility [Appendix 5.1].[2]

Nearly sixty years later, in an episode of the 1991 PBS television series *American Patchwork*, Alan, then in his seventies, narrated a series of filmed interviews and performances of older folk musicians he had made over the previous two decades, explaining how the elderly, or the 'Noble Old' were key to understanding the 'roots' or 'keel' of any 'folk' culture.[3] This chapter argues that the seeds of Alan's concept of the aged were sown around the time he and his father first began to document the music of black southerners like Ballard for the Library of Congress. Much like their contemporaries who listened to old-time music, enjoyed age masquerade, or visited old fiddlers' contests, the Lomaxes interpreted the aged as repositories of old songs, vernacular performance styles,

[1] For Ballard's five recordings, see 'John and Alan Lomax in Louisiana, 1934', available at www.lomax1934.com/sam-old-dad-ballard.html, accessed 6 May 2019.
[2] John and Alan Lomax, 'Sam Ballard (Old Dad), New Iberia, Louisiana', photograph, June 1934, Lomax Collections, American Folklife Center (hereafter AFC), Library of Congress, Washington D.C., available at www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2007660064, accessed 6 May 2019.
[3] Alan Lomax, 'Dreams and Songs of the Noble Old', *American Patchwork* (PBS, 1991).

and oral traditions; as symbolic embodiments of regional, ethnic heritage; and as informed eyewitnesses to history. Accordingly, they sought out, interviewed, recorded, and valorised the elderly, who they regarded as the noble 'last leaves' of the dying tree of 'folk' culture.

The Lomaxes' collective recordings and publications constitute a unique and cherished document of vernacular southern musics in the twentieth century. However, the motives, methods, and ethical practices of these self-proclaimed mediators between 'folk' and 'non-folk' worlds have not been without their criticism. As scholars have shown, each of the Lomaxes held their own distinct configuration of nationalistic, elitist, sexist, and racist outlooks that ultimately shaped their collective and individual projects.[4] This chapter argues that the Lomaxes also held idealised notions about old age that were similar to their romanticised ideas about poverty and racial primitivism, albeit with less severe ramifications. More than this, this chapter uses the age frame to provide a fresh perspective on some of the contentious racial dynamics that were so ingrained in their field work.

The Lomaxes were particularly fascinated by what they considered 'authentic' African American music. While they continued to record artists from different ethnic groups and nationalities during this period, including Mexicans, Caribbean islanders, and white cowboys and mountaineers, they maintained a consistently intense interest in the music of southern African Americans. Although more could be said of the place of old age across the Lomaxes' entire careers this chapter focuses exclusively on how ageing figured into their fascination with black music. Granted, on some occasions, ideas about race or the South had little or no bearing on the Lomaxes' conception of old age or their interactions with their

[4] A selection of critical works on the Lomaxes includes: Karl Hagstrom Miller, *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 241-271; Benjamin Filene, *Romancing The Folk: Public Memory & American Roots Music* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 47-76; Marybeth Hamilton, *In Search of the Blues: Black Voices, White Visions* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 71-125. The two most prominent biographies of the Lomaxes are also occasionally critical of the pair: Nolan Porterfield, *Last Cavalier: The Life And Times Of John A. Lomax* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996); John Szwed, *Alan Lomax: The Man Who Recorded the World* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011).

aged informants. The pair worked with elderly folk musicians of all ethnicities and national backgrounds.[5] Very often though, age tropes and the realities of ageing played into the racial politics of the South that underpinned their recordings of African Americans.

Public and scholarly fascination with the Lomaxes has itself drawn criticism. This is captured most succinctly in Dave Marsh's attack of a flattering *New York Times* obituary of Alan in 2002: 'why is it that, when it comes to cultures like those of Mississippi black people, we celebrate the milkman more than the milk.'[6] Building on Marsh's analogy, a basic argument of this chapter is that the way milk delivery persons choose, package, and deliver their product shapes the way their produce is received and consumed. As such, these cultural mediators are worthy of analysis. Marsh's analogy unintentionally also captures another basic theme of this chapter: milk delivery persons delivered *old* milk to doorsteps. Paradoxically, while the Lomaxes recorded and valorised the aged, many informants faced difficulties *because* they were old. The medical and social effects of ageing, such as memory loss, fatigue, heightened religiosity, and mortality, were practical obstacles for most documentarians. As such, this chapter reveals some of the general procedural challenges folklorists like the Lomaxes faced when working with the aged, but also explores how such issues configured of the wider racial dynamics of their research.

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[5] For example, Alan presented a radio show in the early 1940s that consisted almost entirely of Paul Ledford, an elderly white resident of Galax, Virginia, giving his opinions on the impacts of the Tennessee Valley Authority to the local area: Alan Lomax, 'Mister Ledford and the TVA', in *Alan Lomax: Selected Writings, 1934-1997*, ed. Ronald D. Cohen (New York: Routledge, 2003), 77-85. John recorded a 'old hard-bitten Mexican *vaquero* [cowboy]*'* in Southwest Texas: John A Lomax et al., *Our Singing Country: A Second Volume of American Ballads and Folk Songs* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1941), 65. While, in the Bahamas, Alan recorded a black Caribbean performer who he referred to in his documentation merely as an 'an old man': Alan Lomax, Mary Elizabeth, and Unidentified Man, 'Caesar Riley', audio recording, New Bight, Cat Island, Bahamas, July 1935, Lomax Collections, AFC. Alan included elderly British folk singers in his 1950s BBC television series, *Song Hunter: Alan Lomax,* despite producer David Attenborough reportedly having 'doubts about the advisability of using elderly amateur performers from rural backgrounds in "live" TV broadcasts': E. David Gregory, 'Lomax in London: Alan Lomax, the BBC and the Folk-Song Revival in England, 1950-1958', *Folk Music Journal* 8, no. 2 (2002): 136-169.
[6] David Marsh, 'Alan Lomax', *Counterpunch*, 20 July 2002, available at www.counterpunch.org/2002/07/20/alan-lomax, accessed 7 May 2019.

From 1933 to 1942, the Lomaxes, with the help of several collaborators, assistants, and 'informant-assistants', visited hundreds of locations across the nation, but spent most of their time in the South.[7] These years also saw the Lomaxes become arguably some of most prolific, famous, and influential folklorists of their era, holding various leading roles at the relatively newly established Archive of American Folk Song in the Music Division of the Library of Congress. While John had researched and published on cowboy music over twenty years earlier, the 1930s were the first time he worked full-time as a folklorist with an institutional backer.[8] Although Alan continued to influence the folk music world for decades after, the period between the Depression and the Second World War was formative for the young researcher, going from a teenage Harvard undergraduate to assistant-in-charge at the Archive. Although their collecting activities continued during and immediately after the War, for health reasons John conducted less field work and Alan diverted his attentions to radio and war work, before leaving the US for Europe during the postwar 'red scare'.

The Lomaxes did not focus exclusively on the aged during these trips. Some of the musicians most associated with the Lomaxes, such as Huddie 'Lead Belly' Ledbetter, Woody Guthrie, and Vera Hall, were in their forties or younger when the Lomaxes first met them. The Lomaxes were fascinated by 'the folk' as much as they were by 'folk music',

[7] Between them, the pair made the most number of recording expeditions in Texas (27 trips) and Virginia (13), followed by Louisiana (8), Mississippi (8), Tennessee (7), South Carolina (7), Alabama (6), Kentucky (5), Georgia (5), Florida (5), and Arkansas (3). The Lomaxes recorded most frequently in their home state of Texas and Washington, D.C. (24), home to the Library of Congress. Neither recorded in West Virginia until 1959. During this period, the Lomaxes also made recording expeditions to New York City (7), Ohio (3), and single trips to Pennsylvania, Oklahoma, Indiana, Maryland, New Hampshire, Vermont, New Jersey, and Michigan. Alan also recorded in the Bahamas (2), Mexico, and Haiti. This data can be misleading as an 'expedition' could amount to a few days or several months, but it gives a rough impression of their overriding interest in southern music: Nicholas Fournier et al., 'Lomax Family Audio Recordings, 1908-1991: A Chronological Guide to Field Trips and Recordings' (Washington D.C.: American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, 2016), available at www.loc.gov/static/collections/alan-lomax-manuscripts/documents/lomax_chronology_master_2016.pdf, accessed 6 May 2019.

[8] Although John made a living out of his role at the Library of Congress, he only received a symbolic 'one dollar' salary for his actual work. His income consisted of payments he received for publications, public appearances, and, later, copyright claims: Ronald D. Cohen, *Depression Folk: Grassroots Music and Left-Wing Politics in 1930s America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 42.

meaning, as Mathew Barton argues, that 'their interest was not limited to old songs, which they indeed found but extended to the people - old and young - who sang them and the new songs that some were making.'[9] Although this is partly true, this chapter argues that the Lomaxes were irresistibly drawn to older informants. Not for nothing did they search out and record Uncle Bob Ledbetter, an elderly relative of Lead Belly. This perspective resituates how the Lomaxes are understood historically. If in some ways they helped push the field towards research into how change and transformation characterise vernacular cultures (what is now termed the 'folklife' model), they also worked within an older folklore studies agenda to 'salvage' what they could from 'static but 'endangered' premodern cultures by working with and idealising elders within those communities.[10]

In order to situate the Lomaxes within this disciplinary tension, this chapter is peppered with references to other folklorists interested in what was known contemporaneously as 'negro songs': white folklorists Dorothy Scarborough, Ruby Pickens Tartt, and Lawrence Gellert; the white sociologists Howard Odum and Guy Johnson; the first curator of the Archive, Robert Winslow Gordon, and black folklorists John Work III and Zora Neale Hurston. [11] While the careers of each are too vast to explore adequately here, some key themes and parallels can be drawn from their experiences. Most believed older black informants provided them with unique insight into an older historical period of a particular place, whether the antebellum South, a specific Mississippi plantation, or a more generic 'premodernity'. To varying degrees, each researcher faced similar age-related issues when seeking out, working with, or recording older informants, even if racial, class, and

[9] Mathew Barton, 'The Lomaxes', in *The Ballad Collectors of North America: How Gathering Folksongs Transformed Academic Thought and American Identity*, ed. Scott B. Spencer (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2011), 155.
[10] Broadly speaking, the Lomaxes practiced 'salvage ethnology'. For a summary of the issues with this approach to studying and preserving vernacular cultures, see Huib Schippers, 'Sound Futures: Exploring the Ecology of Music Sustainability', in *Sustainable Futures for Music Cultures: An Ecological Perspective*, ed. Huib Schippers and Catherine Grant (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 1-18.
[11] The Lomaxes reference most of these folklorists as influences in John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax, *American Ballads and Folk Songs* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1934), xxiv, xxxiii.

regional identities distinguished them from one another. In their own way, most valorised elders and age, often in conjunction or tied to their representation of 'blackness' or 'otherness'.

These figures in turn drew from expertise and experiences from within the growing discipline of folklore studies, a field primarily concerned with documenting variants of Anglo-Irish 'ballads' collated by Francis Child in the nineteenth century. In the southern context, many researchers believed white Appalachians had orally preserved the ancient 'Child' ballads of their British and Irish ancestors, and so sought out mountain people, particularly elders, as the bearers of these traditions. The work of British ballad collector Cecil Sharp, who with his assistant Maud Karpeles collected ballads in Appalachia between 1916 and 1918, is representative of this ballad hunter tradition. The age dynamics of such research, if not identical to efforts to document black music, still provide a useful reference point throughout this chapter. Similarly, John Lomax encountered several aged cowhands in his collecting of ballads across the Southwest in the early 1900s, including several elderly black cowboys. Many age-related themes he encountered during those trips would resurface in his field work in the 1930s.

This chapter begins with an outline of some of the more general age issues that the Lomaxes encountered when recording and representing elderly southern African Americans. Subsequently, the chapter follows the Lomaxes through four distinct environments that they considered unique 'sites' for documenting 'authentic' black musics - the church, the plantation, the penitentiary, and the city of New Orleans - and maps some of the distinct age dynamics within each terrain.

Recording Old Folks

Surveys of the Lomaxes' work suggest that they disproportionally focused on aged southern African Americans, who, in the early 1930s, constituted just seven percent of the

South's overall aged population.[12] If they did not always provide exact chronological ages, the Lomaxes often acknowledged in their publications, field notes, audio and field photography how often they came into contact with older musicians. In their first jointly authored monograph, *American Ballads and Folk Songs*, the folklorists provided a list of their most 'interesting' informants, stating the age and disabilities of several of them, sometimes at the expense of their actual names. The pair describe how the song 'Ten Thousand Miles From Home' came from a '72-year-old ex-jailbird, a one-legged "retired" Negro from New Orleans'.[13] In the preface to *Our Singing Country*, their second joint publication from 1941, they listed 'old-age pensioners' as one of the 'types' of informants they encountered.[14] In the same preface, the Lomaxes provided short written portraits of a selection of informants, choosing many older black acts out of the hundreds they met, and focusing as much on their age as their black identity: 'Aunt Harriet McClintock of Alabama, seventy-eight years old … Aunt Molly McDonald, who sat on the sunny porch of her shanty and swapped sixty little songs out of the slavery days with Uncle Joe, her husband'.[15]

Age was a central, occasionally singular categorisation in their slipshod archival method. On the back of a photograph showing an elderly mother siting in a chair in front of her daughter, one of the Lomaxes wrote simply 'Old woman "ballet" seller of New Iberia,

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[12] By comparison, African Americans represented 24.7 percent of the southern population in 1930: Mary Poole, *The Segregated Origins of Social Security: African Americans and the Welfare State* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 49. Eleven volumes of field recordings released by Document Records, nearly all drawn from recordings made by the Lomaxes for the Library of Congress, feature a disproportionate number of aged performers: Various Artists, *Field Recordings Vol 1-11*, (Document Records, 2005-2018). The most detailed collation of information about the Lomaxes' informants is Joshua Clegg Caffery's study of their 1934 recordings along coastal Louisiana. Many of the nearly fifty acts he has identified were of an older age: 'John and Alan Lomax in Louisiana, 1934', available at www.lomax1934.com/performers-by-parish, accessed 3 May 2019. Of the 450 digitised photographs taken by the Lomaxes during their field trips from 1933 to 1950, a significant number show older black artists: 'Lomax photographs depicting folk musicians', Lomax Collections, AFC, available at www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/lomax, accessed 5 May 2019.

[13] John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax, *American Ballads and Folk Songs*, 28.

[14] John A Lomax et al., *Our Singing Country: A Second Volume of American Ballads and Folk Songs* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1941), ix.

[15] Ibid, xi-xii.

Louisiana with her daughter' [Appendix 5.2].[16] On one of the forms used to identify their recordings, the Lomaxes identified an informant at the Parchman State Penitentiary as an 'old train-caller from New Orleans'.[17] Others who worked closely with the Lomaxes testified to their disproportionate number of aged informants. In 1939, John's second wife and recording assistant, Ruby Terrill, wrote on the demographic forces working against them in Livingstone, Alabama: 'many influences are driving these old songs of the folk out of the minds of even the older generation of people who know them.'[18]

Several age-related issues arose when trying to record elderly informants. Memory loss was a constant battle. In 1934, Alan wrote in the *Southwest Review* that one 'old negro' in New Orleans 'quite understandably' could not remember songs that he had not sung for over twenty years.[19] In the same piece, Alan recalled their disappointment when recording Henry Truvillion singing songs that accompanied the laying of railway tracks:

> His memory, which had been prolific out on the job with his men, failed him time after time; his voice, which before had been rich and powerful, was somehow weak and thin; a defect in his speech, which had been scarcely noticeable, now made it almost impossible to understand him.[20]

Truvillion was only in his forties, but memory loss and speech defects created issues in recalling and delivering songs. How much either issue was connected to his age is unclear, but it is plausible that ageing played a part.

Other folklorists encountered mental and physical health issues when recording elderly black informants. Dorothy Scarborough described in some depth the physical

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[16] John and Alan Lomax, 'Old woman 'ballet' seller of New Iberia, Louisiana with her daughter', photograph, June 1934, Lomax Collections, AFC, available at 'www.loc.gov/item/2007660063, accessed 7 May 2019.
[17] Unidentified singer, 'Calling Trains: Sung by an old train-caller from New Orleans, La.', audio recording, April 1936, Lomax Collections, AFC, available at www.loc.gov/item/afc9999005.1780, accessed 7 May 2019.
[18] Ruby Terrill Lomax, 'The American Folk Song Archive', c. 1939, Lomax Collections, AFC.
[19] Alan Lomax, '"Sinful Songs" of the Southern Negro: Experiences Collecting Secular Folk-Music', *Southwest Review* 19, no. 2 (1934): 114.
[20] Alan Lomax, '"Sinful Songs" of the Southern Negro', 111.

ailments and limitations of her informants. In Atlanta, one old woman 'tottered along' towards her, 'leaning on a cane … her frail body neat in a gray gingham dress'. The informant could not sing because the songs had 'mos'ly fled away from me now-days. Dis misery in my back make me stedy 'bout hit mo' dan 'bout singing'. Scarborough regularly found voices that had got 'rusty with disuse'.[21] If memory loss was a constant challenge for folklorists, it was still easier to document songs from the elderly than it was other aspects of vernacular culture. In her 1917 study of North Carolina folk tales, Elsie Clews Parsons concluded that the 'art of the folk-tale in its last stage of disintegration. The tale is cut down or badly told or half forgotten.'[22] If not conclusive evidence, the relative successes of folklorists in finding aged informants who could recall songs, even ballads with dozens of verses, compared to those who collected storytelling broadly correlates with recent neurological and gerontological studies that suggest the ageing brain remembers song better than spoken narrative.[23] Similarly, it was harder to collect dances than songs from elders. As Maud Karpeles later recalled of her experiences collecting folk dances with Sharp in rural England, it was 'mostly old men' who knew the old dances but they were 'no longer able to show them by [their] actual physical movements' due to their older age.[24] In sum, collecting

[21] Dorothy Scarborough, *On The Trail of Negro Folk-Songs* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1925), 3-4, 13.

[22] Elsie Clews Parsons, 'Tales from Guilford County, North Carolina', *Journal of American Folklore* 30, no. 116 (1917): 168-169. Isabel Gordon Carter also found collecting folk tales from aged participants, in her case in the Blue Ridge Mountains, was harder than finding folk songs: [S]o far as the writer knows no collection of the old folk tales has been made in this region. This is not surprising since there are so few people who can tell the old stories. Not infrequently people remember hearing the tales when they were young although they do not remember them in sufficient detail to tell them'. Other issues made remembering tales more difficult than songs. Carter described how Mrs Gentry from Randolph County, North Carolina 'could not take seriously the writer's request for stories' because she believed tales were for children, but ballads were for all ages': Isabel Gordon Carter, 'Mountain White Folk-Lore: Tales from the Southern Blue Ridge', *Journal of American Folklore* 38, no. 149 (1925): 340.

[23] David C. Rubin, *Memory in Oral Traditions: The Cognitive Psychology of Epic, Ballads, and Counting-Out Rhymes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Stéphie Ratovohery et al., 'Is Music a Memory Booster in Normal Aging? The Influence of Emotion', *Memory* 26, no. 10 (26 November 2018): 1344-1354.

[24] Maud Karpeles, 'Cecil Sharp: An Impression' radio broadcast, BBC Radio 4, first broadcast 7 January 1973, BBC Sound Archives, British Library, London, United Kingdom.

songs from old informants, if difficult, was easier than documenting other expressions of 'folk' culture.

If memory loss then, or some form of undiagnosed dementia, were problematic issues for most folklorists who interacted with aged informants of any ethnicity, there were certain racial, spatial, and sonic contexts that complicated the issue in the case of the older black Henry Truvillion. The Lomaxes were fascinated by songs associated with the working lives of African Americans. To avoid the extraneous noises that spoiled their recordings on the railway, the Lomaxes requested Truvillion perform his railway-laying songs inside his home. Other factors likely played a role in the problems of this one session, not least the scepticism Truvillion potentially felt towards the white 'outsiders'. Nevertheless, both common sense and cognitive science suggests that performers, particularly older ones, would have been more likely to remember work-based songs in the workplace setting where they had originally sung them. In older age, a weak memory can be re-strengthened by 'cues' such as immersion in a remembered environment but will worsen in an unrelated physical space to that of the recollection.[25]

Illness and frailty also caused practical issues. In the late 1930s, John returned to Coatopa, Alabama to revisit the elderly Richard Brown, who he had met a few years before, but the old man's eyesight had worsened, meaning he did not at first recognise the folklorist. Again, near Coatopa, John and his second wife Ruby Terrill failed to record the elderly Mrs Hall, who was ill in bed. Reflecting the gendered expectations about care of the era, Terrill, not John, kept Hall company. Terrill received no songs in return for care, just a list of what she called the 'invalid's symptoms'.[26] The threat of mortality also made their task urgent. In

[25] For the effect of the physical environment on memory in older age, see Denise C. Park and Sara B. Festini, 'Theories of Memory and Aging: A Look at the Past and a Glimpse of the Future', *Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences* 72, no. 1 (January 2017): 82-90. For more on Truvillion relationship with John Lomax, see Patrick B. Mullen, 'The Dilemma of Representation in Folklore Studies: The Case of Henry Truvillion and John Lomax', *Journal of Folklore Research* 37, no. 2/3 (2000): 155-174.
[26] Virginia Pounds Brown and Laurella Owens, *Toting the Lead Row: Ruby Pickens Tartt, Alabama Folklorist* (Birmingham: University of Alabama Press, 1981), 27, 30.

Sumter County, Alabama, John was disappointed not to have the opportunity to re-record 'Blind' Jess Harris because the old accordionist had passed on since their last visit.[27]

For all these issues, bodily manifestations of ageing provided powerful images for the Lomaxes' photographic endeavours that were re-used in their publications and displayed to audiences at lectures and other public engagements. A photograph of Wilson Jones (a.k.a. Shavin' Chain) performing in Lafayette, Louisiana, for example, shows the older musician singing open-mouthed with several teeth missing, with his wrinkled brow and cheeks furled up, giving the sense of his raw emotional power overcoming his own deteriorating body.[28] Other photographs captured images of aged informants with their walking sticks, such as Wallace Quarterman outside his home in Frederica, Georgia, and the Rev. J. R. Gipson near his home in Jasper, Texas [Appendix 5.3 and 5.4].[29] A photograph of Uncle Bob Ledbetter (a relative of Lead Belly) shows him sitting with great-granddaughter on his knee playing with his walking stick, presenting him as an aged but debilitated family elder, and a symbolic and literal carrier of family tradition [Appendix 5.5].[30]

The meeting of phonograph machine and aged informant was potently symbolic of the value of their work as documentarians and the power of recorded sound. While in the

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[27] Brown and Owens, *Toting the Lead Row*, 25.

[28] John and Alan Lomax, 'Stavin' Chain playing guitar and singing the ballad 'Batson,' Lafayette, La.', photograph, Lomax Collections, AFC, available at www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/lomax/item/2007660069/, accessed 3 May 2019. The Lomaxes claimed that a spectator who saw Stavin' Chain perform could never 'forget it': Lomax et al., *Our Singing Country*, 335. It is unclear how old Jones was, although in another song he sings about serving during the First World War. If the song was autobiographic, this would make him middle-aged, if not older: Stephanie Hall, '"When I First Got Ready For the War",' a Song of World War I', *Folklife Today*, 19 June 2017, available at www.blogs.loc.gov/folklife/2017/06/when-i-first-got-ready-for-the-war, accessed 3 May 2019.

[29] John and Alan Lomax, 'Wallace Quarterman, Frederica, Georgia', photograph, June 1935, Lomax Collections, AFC, available at http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/lomax/item/2007660094; 'Rev. J.R. Gipson of Merryville, LA, taken at Jasper, Texas', photograph, 30 September 1940, Lomax Collections, AFC, available at http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/lomax/item/2015647531, accessed 3 May 2019.

[30] John and Alan Lomax, 'Uncle Bob Ledbetter at his granddaughter's home, near Mooringsport, Louisiana', photograph, 10 October 1940, Lomax Collections, AFC, available at www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/lomax/item/2007660077/, accessed 3 May 2019.

field, the Lomaxes regularly played back their recordings to shocked, amazed, or frightened informants. When the pair played back recordings to 'Sin Killer' Griffin at Darrington State Farm, Texas, the 75-year-old preacher shook his head in disbelief, telling them proudly 'People been tellin' me I was a good preacher for nigh onto sixty years … but I never knew I was that good.'[31] Performers of any age, Alan wrote, were 'fascinated to hear records of their voices', but poor blacks in the rural South were even less likely to have encountered such technology. Such reactions to the machinery were even more pronounced amongst older generations who had lived most their lives without commercially available records or radio sets. As Henry Adam Svec argues, the Lomaxes were as spellbound by recording technology as they were the sounds they recorded. Just as with commercial elderly old-time artists and radio microphones, the juxtaposition between ageing body and modern technology emphasised the newness of the latter as well as the agedness of the former.[32]

Viewing their work as a moral responsibility to let 'the folk' (and particularly African Americans) hear themselves, the Lomaxes were proud of how playbacks of recordings positively affected their older informants. In John's field notes from 1939, he describes how an 'old and worn and toothless' preacher called Will Lee from near Rose Pine, Louisiana, was at first 'doubtful and mystified' on hearing his recorded self, but then told the recordist with glee that 'I called dat' and 'It act jes' like me.' Significantly, recordings and the recording machine were mirrors into which informants became conscious of their own age. Lee could not help but compare his ageing, debilitating body to the machine itself. 'Dat machine got better voice than me', Lee told John, 'Lost all my teef outa my mouf.'[33] Similarly, 'Aunt' Harriet McClintock near Livingston, Alabama, on hearing her

[31] Alan Lomax, 'Music In Your Own Backyard', *The American Girl*, October 1940, 5-7.
[32] Henry Adam Svec, *American Folk Music as Tactical Media*, (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Amsterdam University Press, 2018), 29-52.
[33] John A. Lomax, '1939 Southern Recording Trip Report', field notes, 18 May 1939, Lomax Collections, AFC, available at https://www.loc.gov/item/lomaxbib000887/, accessed 24 September 2019.

recorded self, exclaimed to the machine and the folklorists 'Sing, "ol" lady! Don't you hear me? Year! Dat's me!'[34]

Regardless of their intentions, the Lomaxes nevertheless infantilised aged informants by highlighting their shock at technology. John believed blacks of any age felt 'intense and absorbing pleasure that a child experiences when he first recognizes himself in a mirror' on hearing themselves recorded, even though most of the incidents in which this happened involved informants who were older than him.[35] John's attitude reflected wider social norms about old age as a 'second childhood' but also longstanding racist tropes about blacks being child-like. In their introduction to *American Ballads and Folk Songs*, the pair thank the many 'Negro boys' and 'girls' who had sang for them, despite in the same text highlighting primarily the most elderly informants.[36] Other folklorists who used phonographs to document black music were equally fascinated by the juxtaposition between a 'childish' aged black informant and recording machinery. Dorothy Scarborough, for example, in her monograph *On The Trail of Negro Folk-Songs* provided a vivid picture of how two nonagenarians, Aunt Jane and Uncle Israel, sang into her recorder: 'I can see now their shaking gray heads close together in front of the mysterious horn, and smile again at their childish delight at hearing the horn give their own songs back to them.'[37] There are also parallels between the Lomaxes and Scarborough's depictions of old musicians and recording machines and the iconic photograph of anthropologist Frances Densmore playing back her recordings of Mountain Chief to the wrinkled old Native American chief with a listening horn. Ultimately, racist ideologies were embedded in folklorists' curiosity about the meeting of aged 'folk' and the recording machinery used to preserve their traditions, even if

[34] John A. Lomax, *Adventures of a Ballad Hunter* (London: Souvenir Press, 2018), 165.
[35] Lomax et al., *Our Singing Country*, xxvi.
[36] John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax, *American Ballads and Folk Songs*, 2.
[37] Scarborough, *On The Trail of Negro Folk-Songs*, 20.

researchers believed they were merely capturing a novel meeting of premodernity and modernity.[38]

In reality, such meetings were far more complex than such images made out. In an article for the *Southwest Review* in 1934, Alan described a recording session at a schoolhouse on a Texan plantation packed with black workers interested in their machine. Their newfound audience was identifiably multigenerational: 'Old men, peering at us out of dim eyes; young men, hats cocked at a rakish angle, red bandanas high about their throats, sitting off away from the women; women with babies; big-eyed children; young women, with their backs to the men, giggling.'[39] After Alan nervously asked if anyone knew the ballad 'Stagolee', the crowd forwarded a nominee: 'Blue knows mo' 'bout Stagolee dan ole Stag do hisself.' The crowd reassured the elderly Blue that 'white man ain't gwine hurt you. What you scai'd of? Dat horn too little fuh yuh to fall in it, too little fuh yuh to sing at wid yo' big mouf.' As many of these plantation workers were unlikely to have seen a phonograph recording machine, it is possible that the younger contingents of the crowd were deflecting their own curiosity, fear, or scepticism towards the technology onto the easy target of the oldest man in the room.

Significantly, Blue, rather than meeting expectations of him as a frightened old technophobe, insisted he sing for the machine, and even demanded that he sang his own 'made up' song, rather than 'Stagolee'. With startling confidence, Blue flipped on its head the commonplace infantilisation of blacks by telling the younger Alan to 'Turn on yo' machine, young mistah, 'cause I ain gwine sing it but one time an' I want to git on yo' recort.'[40] The folklorist Howard Odum encountered a similar scene when collecting songs from a group of black men in 1911. An 'older fellow' of the group boasted to the 'boys'

[38] Bruce White, 'Familiar Faces: Densmore's Minnesota Photographs', in *Travels with Frances Densmore: Her Life, Work, and Legacy in Native American Studies*, ed. Joan M. Jensen and Michelle Wick Patterson (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), 316-350.
[39] Lomax, '"Sinful Songs" of the Southern Negro', 106.
[40] Ibid, 107.

around him that in his day he had been a 'bad man', and so deserved to sing his songs for the white outsider.[41] Such accounts signal how aged male informants, much like old fiddlers at contests with younger competitors, sometimes used the recording situation to reassert their masculinity and virility in front of their younger peers

The factor of age also adds to the frequently made criticism of the Lomaxes: that they were 'cultural imperialists' who used their privilege to exploit black and poor informants.[42] Some older informants were understandably reluctant to relinquish their old songs, which they viewed as one of the few valuable assets they had gained with age. In New Orleans, for example, Billy Williams rejected the offer to record:

> You wants to make records of my singin' an' play 'em over de radio en so nobody will ever wanter hear me play again 'cause den 'ev'body'll know de songs dat I knows an' den where am I at? Des' like you says, dey ain' mainy of us folks what knows de ole songs lef', an' dats what makes me my livin' [sic].[43]

For older singers like Williams, recording and broadcasting - represented, ironically, by two recordists who loathed mass-produced music - threatened the position of elders as repositories of oral culture in their communities. Williams' reaction was an amplification of the anxieties about mechanised sound that existed more generally amongst musicians of the time, not least many musicians' unions. Predating a major American Federation of Musicians strike by a decade, the encounter between the Lomaxes and Williams suggests that some older black musicians were conscious of how unfairly skewed power relations

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[41] Tellingly, Odum racially interpreted this incident as evidence of the inherent bravado of black males, concluding 'The negro loves to boast of being a "bad man"': Howard W. Odum, 'Folk-Song and Folk-Poetry as Found in the Secular Songs of the Southern Negroes (Concluded)', *Journal of American Folklore* 24, no. 94 (1911): 361.

[42] A representative example of this kind of critique against the Lomaxes is an essay by David Hajdu in which he describes Alan as 'a nineteenth-century figure - a domestic colonialist who mistook "discovery" for creation and advocacy for ownership': David Hajdu, *Heroes And Villains : Essays On Music, Movies, Comics, And Culture* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2009), 72. For 'cultural imperialism' in folklore studies, see Jill Terry Rudy, 'Transforming Audiences for Oral Tradition: Child, Kittredge, Thompson, and Connections of Folklore and English Studies', *College English* 66, no. 5 (2004): 524-544.

[43] Lomax, '"Sinful Songs" of the Southern Negro', 108.

between musicians and the recording and broadcasting industries were acutely problematic for those of an advanced age, just as they were for non-white performers.[44]

Conversely, some aged informants used their age to convince the Lomaxes that their unique musical contributions deserved financial compensation. In 1939, the aged deacon Sylvester Johnson impressed John in Vernon County, Louisiana by singing the song 'Samson'. Johnson later wrote John a letter with a transcription of the song's lyrics and a note explaining he had done 'all a poor negro could do' for John, so requested he 'pleas the old negro' by buying him a new bible, as his was 'old and frail'. Johnson's repeated self-reference in his letter to both his poverty and age suggests he felt these qualities might draw the sympathies of the white outsider. It is possible that the relatively meagre and humble choice of payment was purposeful: a new bible to replace a worn one was suitably innocent and age-appropriate gift for an elderly deacon. Johnson did get his bible, showing how aged black informants could exploit assumptions the Lomaxes held about age in order to rebalance in a humble way some of the unequal power dynamics at play during their interactions with the folklorists.[45]

The Lomaxes found aged informants to be useful sources of historical information about specific songs, but some informants used their age as leverage for either attention or money. In Canton, Mississippi, the pair were disappointed to find that Wallis Sanders, supposed composer of the ballad 'Casey Jones', and supposed acquittance of the song's protagonist, had recently died. They instead found the elderly Cornelius Steen who claimed he was the real connection to the popular railway ballad. Basing his authority on his age, Steen happily kept the Lomaxes' attention for a long time despite his many unsubstantiated memories about the song's origins. The Lomaxes were openly sceptical in the writings about

[44] For fears about how mechanised sound, or 'canned music', might cause employment issues for musicians, see John C. Hajduk, *Music Wars: Money, Politics, and Race in the Construction of Rock and Roll Culture, 1940-1960* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2018), 55-88.
[45] Letter from Sylvester Johnson to John A. Lomax, 23 May 1939, John and Ruby Lomax 1939 Southern States Recording Trip Field Notes, AFC 1939/001, Lomax Collections, AFC.

Steen's intentions. Although they did not give explicit reasons why, they presented him as a chancer attempting to show off about his younger years.[46] In the early 1920s, sociologist Guy Johnson encountered similar difficulties while tracing the history of the ballad 'John Henry'. Johnson managed to find several elderly railway workers who had worked the Big End Tunnel in West Virginia, where the eponymous steel driver supposedly died, but struggled because elderly informants often contradicted the testimonies of others. Johnson speculated that desires for either attention or money were the cause for these purposefully misremembered accounts As with Steen, age may also have been a factor, either by accentuating elderly informants' need for financial reimbursement or company, or by contributing to their memory loss.[47]

A final age factor in the Lomaxes' work was the 'generational gap' between the father and son. John Lomax was already an older man when he began working for the Library of Congress. It is conceivable that the 66-year-old bank clerk decided in 1933 to rekindle the passion of his youth because of a 'late-life crisis'. In 1931, John became a widow after the death of Bess Brown, the mother of his children. The Depression had taken away the security of his job at a Dallas bank. His own physical health was fragile at best. As he later reflected:

> I was heavily in debt, I had no job. In 1932 I was barely recovering from an exhausting illness, with a home broken by the death of my wife, my four children scattered, and two of them … still financially dependent on me.[48]

The financial opportunity presented by the Library of Congress posting was no doubt appealing. Still, situating John in his wider life course reconceptualises his decision to return to a hobby from his youth as a nostalgic exercise of an ageing man at a difficult junction in his life. Arguably, John's advanced age might even help explain why he recorded so many

[46] John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax, *American Ballads and Folk Songs*, 37.
[47] Guy Benton Johnson, *John Henry: Tracking Down a Negro Legend* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1929), 33, 45.
[48] John A. Lomax, *Adventures of a Ballad Hunter*, 90.

elderly informants, who he related to on a generational level, if not usually on a socio-economic, cultural, or racial one.

Ageing also affected John in more tangible ways. While his doctor supposedly informed him before his first field recording trips in 1933 that his 'essential systems - heart, lungs, liver, kidneys - were as sound as those of a man half his age', he also suffered from ailments, such as contracting the shaking ague, that likely were made worse by his more senior age throughout his recording trips.[49] In 1934 John underwent a haemorrhoid operation and was sheepish about telling his new wife, Ruby Terrill, possibly because he was embarrassed of seeming like a frail old man in front of his younger partner.[50] Probably for the same reasons, John discharged himself from a hospital in Shreveport, Louisiana in 1933, against his doctor's orders and Alan's advice.[51] In one sense, his age did not make him the best field worker, as he regularly was reliant on younger assistants, including Alan, for help. While visiting the New Zion Baptist Church near De Ridder, Louisiana, John required the 'strong arms of some Negro youths' to help carry the heavy battery-powered recording machinery into the church.[52]

There are parallels here between John and other older folklorists. Ruby Pickens Tartt encouraged John to visit Alabama and hear the folk songs from the informants themselves as her 'memory was such' that she could not remember them clearly.[53] Indeed, the Federal Writers' Project (FWP), who Tartt briefly worked for, hired many older white southerners

[49] For references to John's various illnesses and ailments that slowed down their field trips, see Nolan Porterfield, *Last Cavalier: The Life And Times Of John A. Lomax*, 288; Letter from Alan Lomax to Carl Engel, July 1933, Folder 6, Box 1, AFC 1933/001, Lomax Collections, AFC. Alan Lomax, '"Sinful Songs" of the Southern Negro', 114; John A. Lomax, *Adventures of a Ballad Hunter*, 96-97.
[50] Letter from Alan Lomax to Carl Engel, 3 March 1934, Folder 14, Box 1, AFC 1933/001, Lomax Collections, AFC.
[51] Nolan Porterfield, *Last Cavalier: The Life And Times Of John A. Lomax*, 301.
[52] John A. Lomax, '1939 Southern Recording Trip Fieldnotes', 17 May 1939, AFC 1939/001, Lomax Collections, AFC.
[53] Letter from Ruby Pickens Tartt to John Lomax, c. 1936, Folder 36, Box 1, AFC 1933/001, Lomax Collections, AFC.

whose financial fortunes were rocked by the Depression.[54] Cecil Sharp was in his late fifties during his Appalachian trips, and suffered gout, dental problems, sore throats, asthma, rheumatism and other conditions that, if not all unique to older age, were harder to overcome for the old folklorist.[55] Like John, Sharp was reliant on his younger assistant Maud Karpeles to physically help him and make journeys that he could not.[56]

Generational differences between the two Lomaxes were particularly pronounced on the issue of race relations. Certainly, the senior Lomax, although from a relatively comfortable background, was a country-born Texan who had been nursed by black maids during Reconstruction. His teenage son, meanwhile, was brought up by college-educated parents, and exposed to the radical thinking of the Popular Front and Communist Party milieu at the fringes of Harvard College and in Washington D. C. in the 1930s. In John's letters to Terrill during his early recording expeditions with Alan, he regularly referred to his incomprehension at his son's radical politics, particularly what he considered his overly sympathetic views towards southern blacks. However, their private disputes rarely spilt out into public, largely because the older Lomax believed his son would, in biographer Nolan Porterfield's words, 'lose his radicalism with age.'[57]

It is unclear whether John's senior age or Alan's youth created a better or worse rapport with the aged black informants they attempted to record. Seemingly, the only documented instance where an informant commented explicitly on John's age was the

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[54] Gregory Wood, *Retiring Men: Manhood, Labor, and Growing Old in America, 1900-1960* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2012), 108.
[55] For more details on Sharp and his wife Constance's health, see Michael Yates, 'Cecil Sharp in America: Collecting in the Appalachians', *Musical Traditions*, no. 47 (1999), https://www.mustrad.org.uk/articles/sharp.htm.
[56] For more on how Maud Karpeles helped the aged Sharp traverse the Appalachian Mountains, see Sharp diaries, 23 November 1917, 335, and 8 June 1918, 162, Cecil Sharp Appalachian Diaries, Vaughn Williams Memorial Library, English Folk Dance and Song Society, Cecil Sharp House, London, UK;; Maud Karpeles, 'Cecil Sharp: An Impression' radio broadcast, BBC Radio 4, first broadcast 7 January 1973, BBC Sound Archives, British Library.
[57] For John's letters about Alan's racial politics, see Nolan Porterfield, *Last Cavalier: The Life And Times Of John A. Lomax*, 340. For more on the differences between the Lomaxes on the 'race problem' in the South, see Mathew Barton, 'The Lomaxes', 154.

relatively young Dock Reed from Sumter County, Alabama, who told John's collaborator Ruby Pickens Tartt

> I used to wonder how come my mamma used to love to talk about old folks, and I used to say, what you care about that old critter for, she so old she ain't no use to nobody … But now … I sure sees how it is. Mr Lomac [sic] is a old man, and you is a old lady, and I don't never get tired talkin about you all. I reckon it's 'cause you's my friend [sic].[58]

If this mediated telling is to be believed, it is possible that some black informants were more comfortable sharing their songs with *older* white folklorists.

Churches

The Lomaxes were interested in southern black churches as locales for recording 'authentic' black music because of their historic importance in African American communities in the South since slavery, but also because they believed they were isolated from white influence. In southern black churches, usually Methodist and Baptist denominations, the Lomaxes frequently encountered and were fascinated by older pastors and congregants. The collectors took photographs of the older ministers whom they recorded, such as Rev. Haynes in Eatonville, Florida, and Rev. J. R. Gipson in Jasper, Texas.[59] In his memoir, John recalled a baptism in Austin, Texas ministered by a 'solemn-faced, deep-voiced, white-haired old man', a country church near the Brazos River populated by 'white-haired men and women with faces seamed by lines of age, and a Dallas congregation consisting of a 'sea of somber black faces, many of them old and wizened … with bodies bent by time'.[60] In *American Ballads and Folk Songs*, the Lomaxes describe a

[58] Letter from Ruby Pickens Tartt to John Lomax, 28 December 1944, quoted in Brown and Owens, *Toting the Lead Row*, 51.
[59] John and Alan Lomax, 'Rev. Haynes, full-length portrait, Eatonville, Florida', photograph, June 1935, Lomax Collections, AFC, www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2007660102; 'Rev. J.R. Gipson of Merryville, LA, taken at Jasper, Texas', photograph, Lomax Collections, AFC, 30 September 1940, http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/lomax/item/2015647531, accessed 3 May 2019.
[60] John A. Lomax, *Adventures of a Ballad Hunter*, 188, 198, 208.

church where an old woman 'from slavery times' felt the spirit and began to dance uncontrollably, and another scene at a baptism administered by an elderly preacher who required a stick to help him wade through the water.[61] Sister Crockett of the Church of the Holy Ghost in San Antonio, Texas, meanwhile, possessed 'Deep-graven, firm and resolute lines etched … [into her] impressive face'. For John, these physical signs of ageing captured visually Crocket's years of suffering, sacrifice, and perseverance: 'Seventy years she met the storms of life … more than fifty as a minister of the Gospel calling her people to repentance.'[62] Aside from this focus on the age of those involved in southern black churches, the Lomaxes were also interested in them as intergenerational environments. In a photograph from a Louisiana trip, the Lomaxes frame three generations of Baptists with equal space in the shot.[63]

It is difficult to determine whether southern black church demographics in the 1930s were disproportionally skewed towards older age. Churches certainly provided the kind of company, community, and charity that would have appealed to elderly congregants and ministers. On a spiritual level, churches provided an important 'gerotranscendental' function in stimulating temporal reflection, cosmic wonderment, and divine guidance for those reaching the later stages of life.[64] In the landmark 1933 study, *The Negro's Church*, sociologists Benjamin E. Mays and Joseph William Nicholson found that rural black ministers were generally older than those in urban churches. Similarly, they found that older

[61] The baptism story was actually sent to the Lomaxes from friend and folklorist John B. Jones, but it is notable that they chose to reprint it in their own song anthology: John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax, *American Ballads and Folk Songs*, 581-582.
[62] John A. Lomax, *Adventures of a Ballad Hunter*, 203.
[63] John and Alan Lomax, 'Baptist women, Alma Plantation, False River, Louisiana', photograph, July 1934, Lomax Collections, AFC, available at www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/lomax/item/2007660091, accessed 3 May 2019.
[64] Gerotranscendence is a growing subfield of gerontology which explores the unique temporal and therefore spiritual dimensions of later life: Lars Tornstam, *Gerotranscendence: A Developmental Theory of Positive Aging* (New York: Springer Publishing Company, 2005).

people usually were the first to break into song during Sunday services.[65] Early twentieth century black intellectuals and church leaders had long expressed existential concerns about the ageing of their congregations and clerics, and what that would mean for the future of black religion.[66] It is possible that the Lomaxes were building on this wider assumption that the black church was in decline.

The Lomaxes were not the first white folklorists to encounter aged contingents in black churches or construe them as symbolic of the state of black religion. In *On The Trail of Negro Folk-Songs*, Dorothy Scarborough recounts giving a lecture in a black Baptist church in which she urged congregants to preserve their heritage by keeping alive the spirituals. In Scarborough's account, an elderly teacher arose to enthusiastically agree with her:

> This is one of the happiest days of my life. It does my heart good to hear a white lady from a great university urge us to treasure our racial folk-songs because scholars prize them. We must all work together to collect them and save them for future generations.[67]

Scarborough explicitly used the endorsement of an elderly black parishioner to legitimise her role as a 'white saviour' of spirituals and builder of bridges between black generations. It

[65] Mays and Nicholson also noted that other sociologists, including Arthur Raper, had come to similar conclusions about the older age of rural ministers: Benjamin E. Mays and Joseph William Nicholson, *The Negro's Church* (New York: Institute of Social and Religious Research, 1933), 17, 240, 145.
[66] In 1906, a Tennessean clergyman of the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church wrote that 'the seniors on the bench [are] growing stronger': Charles Henry Phillips, *The History of the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church in America: Comprising Its Organization, Subsequent Development and Present Status* (Jackson, Tennessee: C. M. E. Church Publishing House, 1925), 337. Carter G. Woodson explored the notion of a generation gap in black spirituality in 1922: Carter G. Woodson, *The History of the Negro Church* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018, originally published 1922), 248-249. Several papers from a 1903 Atlanta conference on black religion found that older generation occupied large spaces in black churches. The findings of this conference were published in W. E. B. Du Bois, ed., *The Negro Church: A Social Study* (Atlanta: Atlanta University Press, 1903), 59-60, 96, 161. Perhaps significantly, such generational fears would be less prominent in E. Franklin Frazier's study of mostly northern and urban black churches from 1964: E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Church in America* (New York: Schocken Books, 1964).
[67] Scarborough, *On The Trail of Negro Folk-Songs*, 29.

is entirely possible that through their focus on aged congregants and ministers, the Lomaxes were doing exactly the same.

The correlation between the church and age, however, was not always beneficial for song collection. In a letter to his family, Alan called one Florida minister of a Methodist church an 'old fool preacher' for nervously mumbling his way through a spoken sermon on high-end theology with none of the affectations he considered typical of black Methodist expressive culture. After hearing the recording, the congregation laughed the minister out of the church for his pretentions. Alan wrote that the minister wanted to be 'eddicated' (either a dialect spelling of 'educated' or a typo of 'dedicated') in his 'first appearance before the world' (on the phonograph). While affected eloquence in front of the recording machine was a fairly regular occurrence, the humour for Alan and the congregation lay in the fact that this was a foolish *old* man from a largely uneducated generation pretending to be a learned man.[68]

Outside the church, the connection between religiosity and old age also caused problems for the Lomaxes in their hunt for secular music. Alan wrote after his first year collecting that 'We had found older Negroes afraid for religious reasons to sing for us, while the members of the younger generation were on the whole ignorant of the songs we wanted.'[69] Experiences such as the one they had with the middle-aged Henry Truvillion are particularly revealing. Their otherwise fruitful recording session with Truvillion, aside from his occasional memory loss, was interrupted by a visit from a friend of Truvillion's wife, who was also a member of their church. The Lomaxes discovered that Truvillion was something of a 'prodigal son', having been, in Alan's telling, a 'child of the devil, a sneering and unredeemable skeptic' in his youth, and a repentant convert in his middle age. Alan claimed it was Truvillion's younger wife who had helped him repent and return to the fold.

[68] Letter from Alan Lomax to Family, 22 June 1935, AFC 1933/001, Lomax Collections, AFC.
[69] Alan Lomax, '"Sinful Songs" of the Southern Negro', 106.

Fears of reprimands from his wife and church, Alan inferred, made Truvillion more cautious about recording 'sinful songs', fearful of finding salvation in later life a second time over.[70]

Religious conversion in later life was also a challenge for Dorothy Scarborough, who recalled that 'Aged coloured folk' were proud that they had 'so completely put [secular songs] aside that they have forgotten even that they have forgotten them.' When Scarborough asked informants for dance tunes, 'White heads' would 'wag reproachfully'. A 100 years old woman in Mississippi explained in simple terms to the collector how ageing affected her conception of sinful songs and chances for a heavenly afterlife: 'Honey, I'se got one foot in de grabe. I'se done made mah peace wid Hebben. You ain' want me to draw back now, is you?'[71] Ultimately, if the black church was a fruitful location for finding 'elders', both generationally and clerically speaking, the intersection of spirituality and ageing could create issues for the song collectors.

Plantations

For the Lomaxes, southern plantations, the biggest employers of African Americans generally in the 1930s, were a key terrain in their recording efforts. They believed plantations, like churches, were uniquely segregated worlds in which black folk song was inoculated from white influence and therefore a residue of the older, and for them more 'authentic' and 'emotional', African American culture that had existed under slavery. In reality, the southern plantation was not the perfect 'laboratory' environment they supposed it to be. While racial segregation was real, their theory of isolation overlooked the complex

[70] Ibid, 111.
[71] Scarborough, *On The Trail of Negro Folk-Songs*, 3-4, 13, 97-98. This was not only an issue for collectors of black music. The religious fundamentalism of intensely religious elderly white Appalachians regularly stalled the collecting of Cecil Sharp. Granny Banks near Rock North, North Carolina, had 'taken up religion lately and was rather impossible. I got one song from her': Sharp Diaries, 28 July 1916, 229, Cecil Sharp Appalachian Diaries, Vaughn Williams Memorial Library, English Folk Dance and Song Society, Cecil Sharp House.

cultural syncretism that often occurred on southern plantations in spite of segregation, particularly in the age of mass media. Plantations in the 1930s were not 'frozen' artefacts of antebellum slavery. If the system in which they lived was archaic, sharecroppers were a part of the modernising South that involved both modern media and consumer culture. A case is point is McKinley Morganfield (a.k.a. Muddy Waters), a young black sharecropper who Alan recorded near Clarksdale, Mississippi, but who learnt music from phonograph records and radio and performed 'hillbilly', popular music and African American blues with equal proficiency.[72]

The Lomaxes also recorded in plantations because, like the black church, the plantation economy and demography were in a state of flux in the 1930s. Following the Depression, the southern cotton industry in particular went through a period of rapid mechanisation, which, accompanied by the outward migration of blacks from the rural South, began to change the racial make-up of southern plantations. In 1936, the ex-vice president of the Rockefeller Foundation, Edwin Rogers Embree captured the concerns of many when he lamented that the 'evil' system of southern tenancy farm work was 'becoming increasingly a white problem' as more whites became sharecroppers and more blacks left the South.[73] For the Lomaxes, these economic and demographic shifts were disrupting the 'isolation' that had 'preserved' black culture. Older black sharecroppers therefore embodied the changing of the times. In his *Southwest Review* article from 1934, Alan described one host of a Texan plantation party as 'a toothless cotton-headed old fellow with a mouthful of snuff.'[74] Alan's description of the old man's hair as cotton-like, though not an uncommon adjective for curly black hair, symbolically also captured a sense of loss.

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[72] For more on Waters' eclectic talents and tastes, see Robert Gordon, *Can't Be Satisfied: The Life and Times of Muddy Waters* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2013).
[73] Edwin R. Embree, 'Southern Farm Tenancy: The Way Out of Its Evils', *Survey Graphic*, March 1936, 149. For changes to the cotton industry in the 1930s and 1940s, see Donald Grubbs, *Cry from the Cotton: The Southern Tenant Farmers' Union and the New Deal* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2000); James N. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill: University North Carolina Press, 2005).
[74] Alan Lomax, '"Sinful Songs" of the Southern Negro', 109.

The hair resembled the crop that had defined black economic life in the South and the context from which vernacular African American music had developed. White with age, the toothless man's hair and his ageing body were potent visual metaphors for the passing of the traditional black plantation life to the history books.

Fortunately, it was easier to find aged black informants on plantations than other environments in the South. While a diversity of living arrangements and familial ties could be found on early twentieth century southern plantations, many featured multigenerational homes involving family elders or older fictive kin. The economics of the sharecropping system, in which tenants were allowed to live on and work a landlord's holdings and earn a proportion of the crop's yield for themselves, favoured extended family structures, as offspring and aged relations who could offer auxiliary support domestically and agriculturally at a relatively negligible cost to family income. Relatively lower mortality rates amongst southern blacks meant many were more likely to die before they became too disabled or ill to contribute in small ways to the economic and social life of the plantation. Similarly, with minimal access to old people's homes or elderly care, there was little other option for older blacks than to remain living with younger generations.[75] Older plantation workers often spent their later years attached to the plantations they had worked on, meaning the Lomaxes had better chances finding them. Other workplaces that interested the Lomaxes, by comparison, did not share this multigenerational setting. John long desired to record 'river songs' from the mostly black boatmen of the Mississippi River but his dream

[75] There was a distinctly gendered dimension to the notion of the multi-generational black family setting. In his 1940 sociological study of the black family, E. Franklin Frazier dedicated a whole chapter to 'Granny: The Guardian of the Family': E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family In The United States* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1940), 146-162. The multigenerational character of black sharecropping families, if it became a stereotype, was nevertheless a real demographic hangover from the structures of antebellum slave families: Cheryl Elman and Andrew S. London, 'Racial Differences in Multigenerational Living Arrangements in 1910', *Social Science History* 35, no. 3 (2011): 275-322; David Doddington, '"Old Fellows": Age, Identity, and Solidarity in Slave Communities of the Antebellum South', *Journal of Global Slavery* 3, no. 3 (8 August 2018): 286-312; Stacey K. Close, *Elderly Slaves of the Plantation South* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1997).

was broken when they discovered that those few that still worked the river boats were too busy, tired, uninterested, or too young to know any old river boat songs.[76]

Much like promotional shots of elderly old-time artists with young family members, the Lomaxes documented the multigenerational dynamics of plantations in photographs that show aged informants sat on their porches with children, grandchildren, or 'great-grans' [Appendix 5.6].[77] Close generational ties also provided practical benefits for field recording. Near Livingstone, Alabama, the Lomaxes discovered they could not drive their car (with their recording machine installed into its trunk) down a narrow dirt road to the home of Aunt Harriet McClintock, so they asked her to walk from her house to meet them at the nearest accessible junction. McClintock soon arrived with the help of several great-grandchildren, one of whom carried a chair for her to sit on.[78] A photograph from the session shows John holding a microphone in front of a seated McClintock. The necessities of making a literal 'field' recording in rural Alabama made the intergenerational support available to plantation elders particularly useful.[79] Yet this story unfairly associates McClintock with physical

[76] John A. Lomax, *Adventures of a Ballad Hunter*, 146.
[77] For example, photographs of 'Uncle' Joe and 'Aunt' Mollie McDonald, Uncle Ledbetter, 'Aunt' Harriet McClintock and Alice Richardson all show the elders on the front porch or garden of their homes with one or many (great-)grandchildren around them, or at least the Lomaxes noted that the photograph and recording was made at the home of an informant's child or grandchild. Ledbetter and McClintock referred to great-grandchildren and 'great-grans': John and Alan Lomax, 'Uncle Joe McDonald, Aunt Mollie McDonald, and daughter Janie McDonald, outside their farm home, near Livingston, Ala., 3 November 1940', Lomax Collections, AFC, photograph, available at www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2007660083, accessed 25 September 2019; John and Alan Lomax, 'Uncle Bob Ledbetter, with a group of his 'great-grands' at his granddaughter's home, Mooringsport, Louisiana', photograph, 10 October 1940, available at www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/lomax/item/2007660078, accessed 25 September 2019; John and Alan Lomax, 'Aunt Harriett McClintock at her home near Sumterville, Alabama, with great grandchildren', photograph, 3 November 1940, available at www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/lomax/item/2007660084, accessed 25 September 2019; John and Alan Lomax, 'Alice ('Judge') Richardson, Natchez, Mississippi, at her daughter's home', photograph, 18 October 1940, available at www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2015645807, accessed 3 May 2009.
[78] John A. Lomax, *Adventures of a Ballad Hunter*, 165; Brown and Owens, *Toting the Lead Row*, 33.
[79] John and Alan Lomax, 'Aunt Harriett McClintock at the microphone with John A. Lomax, Sr., Mrs. Ruby Pickens Tartt, and Aunt Harriett's 'great-grands' children in background, at crossroads near Sumterville, Alabama', photograph, 3 November 1940, available at http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2015645817, accessed 3 May 2019. Another photograph

frailty. Another photograph from the same session shows her dancing while singing, suggesting she preferred to sing certain songs in motion as they were performed vernacularly, much like how Uncle Dave Macon insisted on stomping his foot in the recording studio. Some aged informants, like McClintock, used the recording situation to challenge the ageist assumptions held by both the Lomaxes and their own families that they were frail [Appendix 5.7 and 5.8].[80]

McClintock is also notable as being seemingly the only informant who revealed to the Lomaxes that they were a beneficiary of some form of pension. Despite the support she evidently had from her great-grandchildren, she was clearly struggling to make ends meet. After several bouts of illness and the deaths of several children, McClintock, whose partner had left her some years before, was struggling to take care of her family and so received 'he'p fum de Guv'nor'.[81] That seemingly few aged informants did the same likely reflects the widespread exclusion of many African Americans from Social Security, or the shame or embarrassment they might have felt about admitting being on welfare. McClintock's candid admission, however, suggests that aged black informants could be open to folklorists about their dismal financial circumstances, poor health, or reliance on social welfare, but the Lomaxes merely did not often report this back to the general public or document it in their notes.

If plantations were useful for their multigenerational character, physical ailments associated with ageing still managed to disrupt the Lomaxes efforts to record the unique sounds of plantation life. John was keen to document the traditional calls and hollers used by

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shows an unidentified older black woman sitting next on a chair next to the microphone: John and Alan Lomax, 'Mrs. Ruby Pickens Tartt at her home, Livingston, Alabama', photograph, 3 November 1940, Lomax Collections, AFC, available at www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2007660086, accessed 3 May 2019.

[80] John and Alan Lomax, 'Aunt Harriet McClintock, dancing for John A. Lomax, Sr., as she sang 'Shing, Shing,' at the crossroads near Sumterville, Ala.', photograph, 3 November 1940, Lomax Collections, AFC, available at http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2007660085, accessed 3 May 2019.

[81] John A. Lomax, *Adventures of a Ballad Hunter*, 166.

slaves to transfer messages between adjoining plantations, but by the 1930s the practice was more or less known only to a few elderly sharecroppers. At a plantation near Shreveport, Louisiana, Uncle Bob Ledbetter (a relative of Lead Belly) demonstrated some of these calls to Lomaxes, but the 78-year-old's voice 'cracked on the high notes.' They faced a similar issue when recording the elderly Enoch Brown in Livingstone, Alabama. At first Brown's field hollers were too loud for the microphone (which his surviving recordings confirm). After repeated takes in an attempt to accommodate the recording machinery to Brown's loud singing, the sharecropper's voice was so weakened that he could no longer sing.[82]

These issues aside, an obvious appeal of southern plantations was that they were the best location to find the last generation of ex-slaves. For the Lomaxes, ex-slaves were unique carriers of the 'sounds' of slavery. With the aid of Ruby Pickens Tartt, the middle-aged daughter of a prominent cotton planter, for example, the Lomaxes got to know and record several ex-slaves of Sumter County, Alabama, many of whom had once been owned by Tartt's father or neighbors. Tartt first enticed John to visit Sumter County in a letter in which she transmitted a very clear vision of the agedness and blackness of her contacts: 'There is a very old feeble-minded Negro who sings a couple of songs that I cannot catch. They sound like they came out of the heart of Africa.'[83] Tied to her racialised fantasy that her informants were decaying embodiments of African culture was a sense that they were old; so old, in fact, that they were senile, but, importantly for the Lomaxes, still capable of singing. Tartt had a history of interviewing ex-slaves. New York author Carl Carmer published a part-fictionalised account of the state, *Stars Fell On Alabama*, based on conversations with very elderly ex-slaves he had met through Tartt, including the aptly-

[82] John A. Lomax, *Adventures of a Ballad Hunter*, 171. John Lomax, Ruby T. Lomax and Enoch Brown, 'Enoch's field hollers', audio recording, November 1940, Livingstone Alabama, AFS 04055 B03, Lomax Collections, AFC. An informant of any age, if asked to repeat a loud vocalisation that usually would not be repeated, may have also suffered in such a situation, but it is likely that the deterioration of Brown's voice was hastened by his advanced age.

[83] Letter from Ruby Pickens Tartt to John Lomax, c. 1936, Folder 36, Box 1, AFC 1933/001, Lomax Collections, AFC.

named ‘Centennial’.[84] Tartt presented herself as a friend to older black informants, but referred to them possessively as ‘my singers’. She considered informant ‘Blind’ Jessie Harris to be a ‘remarkable old man’ but instructed the vulnerable elderly performer to stay in her servant’s quarters when he came to stay to record for the Lomaxes, likely the same lodgings had been used for her family’s domestic slaves before the Civil War. By contrast, the Lomaxes were always given the guest room.[85]

If the legacies of slave-master relations are visible in Tartt’s treatment of old black performers, an important point here is how the Lomaxes relied on white southern ‘gatekeepers’ not just to enter black communities but also to help source elderly ex-slaves within them. Reporting to his seniors at the Library of Congress about his experiences in Alabama, Alan wrote that without the ‘hospitality and active aid’ of Tartt, their recording ventures would have been impossible.[86] Several white southerners offered the Lomaxes their networks of aged black informants. In Merryville, Louisiana in 1939, John visited Herman R. Weaver who knew ‘all the old Negroes in that part of the country’, having been a representative for many years of the lumber companies that employed most of the town’s black labour.[87] Similarly, on Avery Island, Louisiana in 1934, the Lomaxes contacted E. A. McIlhenny, a collector of spirituals, who happily introduced them to two old female ex-slaves. McIlhenny’s family had employed blacks on the island for decades, and so knew where to find aged informants. As John noted in a letter to Carl Engel, his Library of

[84] Howard Raines demonstrates that Carmer created characters that resembled Tartt, and that it was her who introduced him to Centennial and other aged Alabamians: Howard Raines, ‘Introduction’, in Carl Carmer, *Stars Fell on Alabama* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2000, first published 1934), xix, 176-177.
[85] Ruby Pickens Tartt, , ‘Blind Jesse and His Macordium’, quoted in Brown and Owens, *Toting the Lead Row*, 22.
[86] Letter from Alan Lomax to Harold Spivacke, 30 June 1937, Folder 283, Box 8, AFC 1933/001, Lomax Collections, AFC
[87] John A. Lomax, ‘1939 Southern Recording Trip Fieldnotes’, May 16-19, 1939, John and Ruby Lomax 1939 Southern States Recording Trip, AFC 1939/001, Lomax Collections, AFC.

Congress superior, the visit produced a 'valuable record of the way spirituals were sung "before de war"'.[88]

The Lomaxes relied on similar gatekeepers to access the aged within white communities. In Harlan, Kentucky, for example, John liaised with Harvey H. Fuson, author of *Ballads of the Kentucky Highlands*, to help him meet white mountain elders because the folklorist had encountered many while collecting ballads there .[89] Other folklorists, meanwhile, such as Dorothy Scarborough, were known to rely merely on older white intermediaries, such as the Confederate veteran John Allan Wyeth, to provide songs from the 'old plantation of days before the War.' [90] John's predecessor as curator of the Archive of American Folk Song, Robert Winslow Gordon, likewise was satisfied in hearing elderly white informants recall and perform 'negro songs' that they had learnt from their family's domestic workers or slaves.[91] This racial mediation did not deter these folklorists from hearing 'blackness' in the voices of these old white southerners.[92] For them, age was a cipher for race. The Lomaxes typically interpreted older white southerners with family connections to plantations as useful networkers, helping them source and arguably pressure older black informants into helping them. It is conceivable that it was easier to elicit songs from aged ex-slaves in the company of local whites from old planter families who had

[88] Letter from John Lomax to Carl Engel, June 1934, Folder 17, Box 1, AFC 1933/001, Lomax Collections, LOC.
[89] Nolan Porterfield, *Last Cavalier: The Life And Times Of John A. Lomax*, 303.
[90] Writing about another aged white singer, Scarborough described how 'One can imagine how vividly the plantation slaves much have sung this spiritual song': Scarborough, *On The Trail of Negro Folk-Songs*, 70. For an extensive analysis of Scarborough's relationship to black music, see Marybeth Hamilton, *In Search of the Blues: Black Voices, White Visions* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 53-90.
[91] Examples of such informants are mentioned in the following correspondence: Letter from Dave L. Whiteaker to Robert Winslow Gordon, 22 July 1923, Box 1, Robert Winslow Gordon Collection, AFC; Letter from James Purdon to Robert Winslow Gordon, 22 July 1923, Box 1, Robert Winslow Gordon Collection, AFC.
[92] There are parallels here to the process in which whites donning black face were heard as authentically 'black'. If dating back to blackface minstrelsy, this phenomenon continued well into commercial recording era: Karl Hagstrom Miller, *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 9-12.

directly or indirectly wielded considerable social, economic and legal power over them for several decades.

Many of these white southern gatekeepers, Tartt included, were involved with the FWP, a New Deal agency under the jurisdiction of the Works and Projects Administration (WPA) that employed writers to document local folk culture often with the help of aged informants. There were indirect and direct connections between the Lomaxes and the FWP. Through Genevieve W. Chandler's work for the FWP in South Carolina in 1937, for example, the Lomaxes received songs and the contact information of 'Aunt' Hagar, an old domestic worker who they went on to record.[93] Over 1939-1940, the folklorist Herbert Halpert conducted a lengthy recording expedition of the southern states on behalf of the FWP with the support of the Lomaxes and the Library of Congress. Many of the hundreds of informants he found were elderly. As Halpert later recalled, he did not record 'all the boys with black [cowboy] hats and guitars, who were dying to have me record them … I was recording grandpa.'[94] Like the Lomaxes, FWP workers dramatized the agedness of their informants. In a text designed for FWP publication, Tartt described an aged informant called Susanna Ross as 'ancient' and 'old and twisted', with 'aged bones', her feet 'gnarled with rheumatism', her eyes 'cloudy with cataracts', and her hearing severely impaired'.[95]

In 1936, John became the FWP's National Advisor on Folklore and Folkways and was a significant influence on the development of their Slave Narrative Collections.[96]

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[93] Letter from Genevieve W. Chandler to John Lomax, 16 April 1937, Folder 43, Box 1, AFC 1933/001, Lomax Collections, AFC.
[94] Herbert Halpert interview with Peggy Farber, Debora Kodish, and Gerald E. Parsons, 17 November 1978, AFC 1979/024, AFC.
[95] Ruby Pickens Tartt, 'Susanna Ross', c. 1937-1939, reprinted in Brown and Owens, *Toting the Lead Row,* 51.
[96] Norman R. Yetman demonstrates that while black scholars at Fisk University and Southern University initially drove the wider interest in using ex-slave narratives as a method to revaluating the history of American slavery, the FWP's Collection 'assumed a form and a scope that bore John's imprint and reflected his experience and zeal as a collector of folklore': Norman R. Yetman, 'The Background of the Slave Narrative Collection', *American Quarterly* 19, no. 3 (1967): 550. For an example of the use of aged ex-slave narratives by a black historian prior to the FWP's Slave Narrative Collection, see John B.

Several scholars have highlighted how age-related issues related to memory, alongside more contentious racial contexts, make these interviews problematic as historical sources, and many of these same criticisms can be reapplied to the Lomaxes' musical recordings.[97] The Lomaxes' recordings and the FWP interviews dovetailed with the wider movement during the New Deal years that sympathetically documented the lives and societal contributions of aged Americans. In the agency's famous published anthology, *These Are Our Lives*, editor W. C. Crouch provided an impressive list of the diverse occupations and identities of those interviewed for the project, which, like the list the Lomaxes wrote to introduce their *American Ballads and Folk Songs*, included 'old people' as a distinct category of informant. Crouch repeatedly returned to the plight of the aged in the South, who were facing 'troubles', one North Carolina informant told an interviewer, merely because they had 'lived too long'.[98] If more could be said of the age politics surrounding the FWP, its relevance here is merely to demonstrate how the age issues and tropes the Lomaxes encountered on behalf

Cade, 'Out of the Mouths of Ex-Slaves', *Journal of Negro History* 20, no. 3 (1935): 294-337.

[97] Prior to the Slave Narratives Collection, the most authoritative work on slavery at the time rejected outright any study that used reminiscences of ex-slaves: Ulrich B. Phillips, *American Negro Slavery: A Survey of the Supply, Employment and Control of Negro Labor as Determined by the Plantation Regime* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1918). For a representative example of the debates about the role of ageing in the FWP's slave narratives, see John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972); Al-Tony Gilmore, ed., *Revisiting Blassingame's 'The Slave Community': The Scholars Respond* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1978). Contemporary black scholars were nevertheless aware of age-related issues: 'The passing of the years, the early age of witnesses at the time, and the bitterness against the institution of slavery might be arguments against the historical accuracy of everything which follows. Even the love to weave a good story for attentive listeners bids us be cautious': Cade, 'Out of the Mouths of Ex-Slaves', 295.

[98] Crouch asked his readers 'What is to be done for the farmer and his wife who have worked, reared a large family, who now at an advanced age are too old and weak to work, children now grown and away from home, earning barely enough but not more than enough to support themselves?': W. C. Crouch, ed., *These are Our Lives, as Told by the People and Written by Members of the Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration in North Carolina, Tennessee, and Georgia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1939), xviii.

of the Library of Congress were one manifestation of a wider interest in older Americans in the 'cultural front' of the New Deal years.[99]

Contemporaneous black researchers of black music also interacted with aged informants. Zora Neale Hurston, for example, accompanied Alan and Mary Elizabeth Barnicle, a white folklorist, on recording expeditions to Florida, Georgia, and the Bahamas. Being an African American woman from the South and an experienced folklorist, the Lomaxes considered Hurston a useful mediator between them and more 'closed' plantation communities.[100] Her race and southern background may have made her better placed to gain the confidence of older informants. In an interview with the ex-slave Wallace Quarterman from St. Simons Island, Georgia, Hurston is more sensitive than her colleagues in the aged informants about painful episodes of his life. Hurston gently asks open questions about his experiences as a slave ('After they said you can go free, then what did you do?'), arguably thereby providing the comfortable setting that prompts Quarterman to subsequently sing a moving song, 'Kingdom Coming', about what happened to freed slaves after Emancipation. Alan, by contrast, in reference to the Reconstruction era in Georgia, asks Quarterman rather bluntly, 'did the white folks like it when you all were in town?' When Quarterman gives an unclear, mumbled answer, Hurston steps in to clarify and almost 'translate' Alan's question by framing it more personally, asking whether his 'old master' liked to see blacks, for example, working in the courthouses. It was Hurston's race more than anything which made her more attuned to the sensitivities of interviewing aged ex-slaves, but she was clearly aware of how Quarterman's advanced age meant she would have to be especially respectful in order to engage with him. Throughout this more delicate portion of their interview,

[99] For an example of how the symbolism of age figured into some of these politics, see Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 2011), 246.
[100] As Alan wrote of Hurston, 'she can really tell us … about the people we come in contact with': Letter from Alan Lomax to Family, 22 June 1935, 1933/001, Lomax Collections, AFC. For the complex relationship between Hurston and the Lomaxes, see Nolan Porterfield, *Last Cavalier: The Life And Times Of John A. Lomax,* 367-370.

Hurston can be heard providing verbal affirmations which expressed to Quarterman that she was listening and understanding everything he said.[101]

If Hurston was arguably more skilled than Alan at the job of interviewing elderly blacks, she was equally fascinated as him by the age of her informants. In a 1939 application to the WPA for a recording expedition in Florida, Hurston listed with excitement the many elderly Floridians including rivermen 'who have plied the St. John's River for more than one generation with their songs, stories, and observations'.[102] In her 1935 book *Mules and Men*, Hurston discovered it was mostly 'old folks' who were familiar with the Louisianan 'hoodoo' and other aspects of southern black folklore that interested her. She also replicated some of the Lomaxes' morally questionable practices when working with aged informants. Hurston even fabricated and plagiarised much of her account of one aged ex-slave, a text that has only recently been released in its entirety. Rather than respecting the narrative of her aged informant, Hurston embellished her research to make it fit her broader political agenda.[103]

Another point of comparison between the white Lomaxes and black folklorists is the jointly led Fisk University and Library of Congress 'Coahoma County Study' (1941-1942), involved pioneering comparative musicologists and sociologists from the famed black

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[101] Alan Lomax, Zora Neale Hurston, Mary Elizabeth Barnicle and Wallace Quarterman, 'Interview with Wallace Quarterman, Fort Frederica, St. Simons Island, Georgia, June 1935 (part 2 of 2)', June 1935, Alan Lomax, Zora Neale Hurston, and Mary Elizabeth Barnicle Expedition Collection, AFC 1935/001, AFC, available at https://www.loc.gov/item/afc1935001_afs00342b/, accessed 11 June 2019.

[102] Hurston also wrote 'In this same area there are men like old "Pap" Drummond of Fernandina who tell tales of the Pirates who roamed the Spanish Main and tell of buried treasures. Pap Drummond lives in his shack on the outskirts of Fernandina with his "family" of rattlesnakes rustling now and then in their dugout near at hand, and draws a long bow on the lawless men of the skull and crossbones of yesteryear. He claims to have aided in the last recovery of pirate treasure … Some have seen the last of the Indian fighters …': Zora Neale Hurston, 'Proposed Recording Expedition into the Floridas', May 1939, Zora Neale Hurston Corporate Subject File, AFC, available at https://www.loc.gov/item/flwpa000213/, accessed 11 June 2019.

[103] Zora Neale Hurston, *Mules and Men* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1990), 185. For the entire saga involving Hurston's interviews with Cudjo Lewis, see Zora Neale Hurston, *Barracoon: The Story of the Last 'Black Cargo'*, ed. Deborah G. Plant (New York: Amistad, 2018).

college, namely John Work III and Lewis Jones with guidance from Charles S. Johnson.[104] The team worked temporarily alongside Alan to document the folk culture of Coahoma County in the Mississippi Delta. The prism of age was central to proving the study's central hypothesis that the region was undergoing a rapid economic and cultural transformation. Informants were categorised into generational cohorts named after historical modes of transportation: 'The River' (70 to 90 year olds), 'The Railroad' (50 to 70 year olds), and 'The Highway' (30 to 50 year olds). Whereas Lomax created, in the words of scholars Robert Gordon and Bruce Nemerov, an 'appealing but static and nostalgic portrait of black Southern America', Work and Jones painted a more realistic picture of the complexity of the Mississippi Delta.[105] The researchers encountered age-related issues such as memory loss, but they were generally unromantic about the agedness of their informants and more nuanced in their analysis of the subtle differences and continuities between the generations.[106] For example, Work and Jones teased out how subtly different the outlooks were between the River and Railway generations. The slightly younger cohort frowned 'at the violence of the pioneer life [of the River generation] … and the disorderly life of the present', while the older extolled the virtues of the pioneers of the Delta. At the other end of the age spectrum, Work and Jones saw in young Mississippians 'a pattern of living which conforms with their opportunities as well as with the varied inheritance from their elders.'[107]

Due to a web of university politics, wrangling over the project's direction, Alan's diverted attentions, and animosities between Work and Alan, the study was never finished.

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[104] Johnson had already researched generational issues in black communities from a youth perspective, the product of which was published around the time of the Coahoma Study: Charles S. Johnson, *Growing Up In The Black Belt: Negro Youth In The Rural South* (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 1941).
[105] Robert Gordon and Bruce Nemerov, 'Introduction', in John W. Work, Lewis Wade Jones, and Samuel C. Adams, *Lost Delta Found: Rediscovering the Fisk University-Library of Congress Coahoma County Study, 1941-1942*, ed. Robert Gordon and Bruce Nemerov (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2005), 25.
[106] Jones reported that many older informants could not remember much when asked about older times. One told him they did not 'have their real mind no more': Lewis Wade Jones, 'The Mississippi Delta', in Work, Jones, and Adams, *Lost Delta Found*, 33.
[107] Lewis Wade Jones, 'The Mississippi Delta', in Work, Jones, and Adams, *Lost Delta Found*, 34-35.

Only the interviews with the oldest 'River' generation were completed. Although there was some rational logic to beginning with this older cohort anyway, there were practical reasons as well: due to some particularly rich harvests on the plantations, the project was continuously delayed because most of the plantation's young and middle-aged population worked in the fields until late, and were too tired to contribute in the evenings. Plantation bosses were also more wary that the outsiders might distract their labour force, or worse, unionise their workers or inspire them to leave the plantation.[108]

Clearly, the Lomaxes came onto plantations as white researchers with all the attendant racial dynamics that entailed, and these issues affected their work on plantations more than notions of age. Unlike African American churches, which, by and large, were exclusively black environments, plantations were often, though not always, run under the watchful eye of white bosses, who were key factors to the possibility, process, and products of plantation recordings. Black folklorists such as Hurston, Work, and Jones, meanwhile, generally could 'access' rural black communities and elicit songs from aged blacks more easily than the Lomaxes, even if local animosities about elites and age-related issues could also prove problematic.[109]

Significantly, at least one black plantation worker tried to use the Lomaxes' bias towards old age to help them navigate the racially charged and potentially violent circumstance of the recording situation. When the Lomaxes visited the Smithers Plantation near Huntsville, Texas in 1933, a plantation manager instructed a younger black renter, 'One-Eye' Charley, to provide some 'old-time nigger singin'' for their guests. Supposedly for religious reasons, Charley initially did not want to sing secular songs for the Lomaxes, so recommended instead that they visit the nearby Blanton Plantation, where they could find an

[108] Gordon and Nemerov, 'Introduction', in Work, Jones, and Adams, *Lost Delta Found,* 10-25.
[109] For some of the issues Work and Jones faced when working with blacks in the Delta due to their privileged and educated upbringing, see Gordon and Nemerov, 'Introduction', in Work, Jones, and Adams, *Lost Delta Found,* 25.

'ole feller' called Patterin'. The manager, assuming that Charley was unhelpfully deflecting attention away from himself, castigated his worker: 'Wait a minute … you lyin' black rascal, you. You can sing an' you know it.' Alan described Charley's body as 'taut as if he were ready to run and could scarcely control himself, sweating in the extremity of his fear and embarrassment.'[110]

Considering many plantation bosses physically or financially coerced black tenants, and Charley was visibly fearful of the plantation boss, it is plausible that he tried to sell the Lomaxes the idea of visiting an older singer at another plantation in order to avoid any complications with his manager.[111] If this were true, it is equally possible that the aged singer did not even exist. Charley's cautionary word to the Lomaxes that the elderly Patterin' may no longer be alive could have been his informal insurance in case the Lomaxes actually took his advice and returned disappointed after finding no elderly man at the next plantation. There is good reason to speculate that this was the case. In the commercial recording world, A&R personnel regularly encountered plantation landlords who were suspicious of outsiders taking too great an interest in their workers.[112] This albeit one-sided account of this incident suggests that some African Americans may have used or exaggerated their later-life conversion in order to avoid getting into trouble with white plantation bosses for singing black secular or 'dirty' music.

Another potentially problematic racial context of plantations related to how the Lomaxes referred to older black informants. The Lomaxes regularly referred to elderly blacks with 'Uncle' and 'Aunt' titles, and probably perceived their doing so as acts of

[110] Alan Lomax, '"Sinful Songs" of the Southern Negro', 105.
[111] For violence against black sharecroppers, see Edward Royce, *The Origins of Southern Sharecropping* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010); Donald Grubbs, *Cry from the Cotton: The Southern Tenant Farmers' Union and the New Deal* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2000).
[112] For this reason, A&R personnel occasionally employed black artists as talent scouts and gave them notes of introduction from record labels explaining clearly their purposes on the plantation: Brian Ward and Patrick Huber, *A&R Pioneers: Architects of American Roots Music on Record* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2018), 65.

respectful deference to their elderly informants, echoing how the black community referred to some of its own elders. In *Caste and Class in a Southern Town*, the white social scientist John Dollard noted how important 'age grading' was within southern black communities. As such, Dollard felt it important to use age-graded titles when he talked with older participants, not only out of respect, but in order to achieve a greater rapport. However, this caused issues with the local white population, particularly when Dollard deferred to age by referring to older blacks as 'Mr' or 'Mrs'.[113] No evidence suggests the Lomaxes experienced these exact difficulties with local whites, although their interest in blacks did occasionally upset some of the racial hierarchies. That the folklorists seemingly opted to use 'Uncle' or 'Aunt' rather than the more deferential 'Mr' or 'Mrs' perhaps explains why they did not get into so much trouble, as those particular age-based titles more or less fitted with imagery of elderly blacks as 'old-time negroes' of the Uncle Remus and Aunt Jemima moulds.

Penitentiaries

Even more so than southern plantations, the Lomaxes believed that the intrinsically seclusive nature of southern penitentiaries meant they were suitable environments to document older forms of black music. As John would later recall: 'On the penitentiary farms, where Negro labor must be done in groups, the plantation "hollers" yet live.'[114] In 1934, Alan gave a more detailed explanation:

> There, we thought, we should find that the Negro, away from the pressure of the churchly community, ignorant of the uplifting educational movement, having none but official contact with white men, dependent on the resources of his own group for amusement, and hearing no canned music, would have preserved and increased his heritage of secular folk music.[115]

[113] John Dollard, *Caste and Class in a Southern Town* (New York: Yale University Press, 1937), 348.
[114] John A. Lomax, *Adventures of a Ballad Hunter*, 146.
[115] Alan Lomax, '"Sinful" Songs of the Southern Negro'. 106.

For all their belief that prisons kept out 'canned music', many younger prisoners, not least their most famous 'discovery', Lead Belly, knew and performed several popular hits he had heard over the radio or on records. For this reason, they reckoned that older 'long-term' prisoners were less likely to be influenced by mass media. Following their first recording trips to penitentiaries in Texas, Louisiana and Mississippi in 1933, John informed his superiors at the Library of Congress that

> Negro songs in much of their primitive purity can be obtained probably as nowhere else from Negro prisoners … Thrown on their own resources for entertainment, they still sing, especially the long-term prisoners who have been confined for years and who have not yet been influenced by jazz and the radio, the distinctive old-time Negro melodies.[116]

A year later, in *American Ballads and Folk Songs*, the Lomaxes described how the informants in prisons who were of the 'greatest influence' to them were 'lifers … confined in the penitentiary, a few as long as fifty years … [who] still sang the songs they had brought into confinement, and these songs had been entirely in the keeping of the black man'.[117] John implied that because life-termers were older and therefore more likely to be uneducated and illiterate ('with little Latin and no Greek') they were 'purer' sources of oral culture. 'A recent arrival', John argued, 'especially if from a town, is usually under the influence of jazz and the radio and knows no ballad or folk song.'[118] Alan, reflecting years later on their recordings in Parchman Farm, wrote that although many 'old-timers had lost their voices … most of the young prisoners regarded [work song singing] as "old-fogeyism".'[119]

Prison populations during the 1930s were, by and large, predominantly young. Unsurprisingly, the life expectancy of incarcerated African Americans was lower than the

[116] Report of John Lomax in *Report of the Librarian of Congress for the fiscal year ending June 30 1933*, (Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1933), 99.
[117] John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax, *American Ballads and Folk Songs*, 28-29.
[118] Report of John Lomax in *Report of the Librarian of Congress for the fiscal year ending June 30 1934*, (Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1934), 125.
[119] Alan Lomax, liner notes to Various Artists, *Murderer's Home* (Pye Nixa NJL 11, 1957).

wider black population.[120] For sure, cajoling or coercing informants of any age into performing was always going to be easier in prisons than on the outside. Dennis Child succinctly explains how in penitentiaries, unlike churches and slightly less so than plantations, an 'imprisoned black person could not say "no" when ordered to perform for white folkloric tourists by his prison master'.[121] Still, prisons collectively contained several life-timers that were of use to the Lomaxes. The age demographics of some types of prisons, however, proved more accommodating than others. More material surfaced, for example, in state and federal prisons than in the convict lease system.[122] An obvious reason for this was that the profit motive of the convict lease system meant there was fewer incentives for the prison's literal and symbolic 'gatekeepers' of guards and wardens to cooperate with two researchers from the Library of Congress. Another contributing factor was that the average life expectancy in the convict lease system, a notoriously exploitative method of incarceration in which prisoners essentially were sold to private companies, was significantly lower than either the state or federal systems. Ultimately, there were more elderly 'lifers' in state-controlled facilities than in private ones.[123]

More generally, prisons produced the kinds of aged informants that were particularly useful for the Lomaxes. A 1953 report for the American Prison Association found that guards viewed older prisoners as frailer and therefore lesser security threats, meaning they were given more freedoms and fewer responsibilities. This may have made them more 'available' to perform for the Lomaxes. The same report also revealed that aged inmates

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[120] Ethan Blue, *Doing Time in the Depression: Everyday Life in Texas and California Prisons* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 195. Interestingly, one African American prisoner recalled things differently. An informant in a Texan prison told folklorist Bruce Jackson in the early 1960s that 'they didn't have any young men in the system [in the 1940s], all was old men': Bruce Jackson, ed., *Wake Up Dead Man: Hard Labor and Southern Blues* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1999), 7.
[121] Dennis Childs, *Slaves of the State: Black Incarceration from the Chain Gang to the Penitentiary* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 239.
[122] Report of John Lomax in *Report of the Librarian of Congress for the fiscal year ending June 30 1934*, (Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1934), 124.
[123] Paula Johnson, *Inner Lives: Voices of African American Women In Prison* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 28; David M. Oshinsky, *Worse Than Slavery: Parchman Farm and the Ordeal of Jim Crow Justice* (New York: Prentice Hall & IBD, 1997), 46.

were more segregated from the rest of prison life: 'The older inmate often finds himself out of place and unwanted in the modern busy institution where programs are underway for young men.'[124] After returning to record in southern penitentiaries in 1939, John wrote that this sense of isolation may have contributed to their song-hunting success: 'In the solitude and loneliness of confinement the Negro recalls the songs that he learned as a child.'[125] For older inmates, the isolation of prison life encouraged self-reflection, nostalgia, and a longing for older days which psychologically put them a frame of mind that was conducive for eliciting older songs.[126] However, the health context of southern penitentiaries may have complicated the Lomaxes' recording efforts. A 1941 report on the prison system noted the poor health of black prisoners and aged inmates in particular.[127] Older inmates who were physically incapable of working on prison farms were often punished, sometimes violently, for not being able to fulfil their duties.[128] Alan's discovery then that the voices of many incarcerated 'old-timers' were too 'frail' to record properly is contextualised by the acutely violent conditions of prison life for the aged.

The fact that older prisoners were often frail or ill nevertheless had the unintended consequence of pooling them together in one space: the prison hospital ward. The Lomaxes first encountered the two older prisoners who they later wrote were their favourite 'finds', Moses 'Clear Rock' Platt and James 'Iron Head' Baker, in the hospital ward of Central State Farm near Sugarland, Texas. As Alan recalled, it was sometimes difficult to find a sonically suitable recording location in prisons as they could not control loud background noises. Understandably, some prisoners were reluctant to record, as the Lomaxes naively once

[124] M. R. King, 'The Aged Prisoner: The Area of Medicine and Psychiatry' in *Proceedings of the Annual Congress of Correction of the American Prison Association* (New York: American Prison Association, 1953), 189.
[125] John A. Lomax, '1939 Southern Recording Trip Report', Lomax Collections, AFC.
[126] For criminological reviews of issues to do with aged prisoners, see Ann Goetting, 'The Elderly in Prison: Issues and Perspectives', *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 20, no. 2 (1 July 1983): 291-309.
[127] Harry H. Jackson, 'The Value of the Medical Department to an Institutional Program Medical Section' in *Proceedings of the Annual Congress of the American Prison Association* (New York: American Prison Association, 1941), 388-394.
[128] Blue, *Doing Time in the Depression*, 92.

suggested, in the well-soundproofed, but morbid space of the prison execution chamber. By trial and error, the Lomaxes discovered that hospital wards were relatively good spots for cutting records.[129] The growth of hospital wards, one of several improvements to custodial prison care over the 1920s and 1930s, inadvertently created a space that was relatively quiet but also filled with temporarily incapacitated, non-working, and often older prisoners.[130]

The Lomaxes dedicated whole sections in their various publications to their experiences with Platt and Baker.[131] Platt was aware of what his age signified to them. In John's account of their first meeting, Platt tore past other black inmates who had gathered around their recorder in the hospital ward: 'Gimmie room, niggers, gimmie room. Let me git at dat singin' machine. I'se de out-singin' est nigger on dis here planation. I'se been in de pen forty-nine years off and on, an' I ought to know all de songs. Git out o' my way!'[132] The Lomaxes were suspicious of Platt's claims to older age. 'According to his own telling', Alan reported, '[Platt] is seventy-one years old and has spent forty-seven of those years in Texas prisons.'[133] They nevertheless were impressed with Platt's knowledge of folk song. As John recalled, 'Clear Rock seemed to have caught in his capacious memory the floating folk songs that had been current among the thousands of black convicts who had been his only companions for fifty years.'[134] Unlike other aged informants whose memories were leaking old songs, Platt was a fountain of black folk music, having pooled songs together for nearly half a century.

For an elderly and incarcerated man like Platt, the recording situation presented an opportunity to reassert his masculinity. He gave the Lomaxes detailed descriptions of how

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[129] Alan Lomax, 'Music In Your Own Backyard', 5-7.
[130] Improvements to prison hospital care was a talking point in Howard B. Gill, 'Case Work and the Prison Administration Individualization of Treatment Through Case Work' in *Proceedings of the Annual Congress of the American Prison Association* (New York: American Prison Association, 1933), 178.
[131] John, for example, dedicated a whole chapter to 'Iron Head and Clear Rock' in his autobiography: John A. Lomax, *Adventures of a Ballad Hunter*, 141-171.
[132] John A. Lomax, *Adventures of a Ballad Hunter*, 152.
[133] Alan Lomax, '"Sinful" Songs of the Southern Negro', 115.
[134] John A. Lomax, *Adventures of a Ballad Hunter*, 153.

quick a runner he was, especially when escaping prison. Poignantly in the context of a modernising South, and also reflective of a wider function of motor vehicles and trains as metaphors for freedom in African American expressive culture, Platt described in an especially fantastical prison escape story how his ageing body transmogrified into an assemblage of efficient, modern machinery: 'feet was splat-splattin' on de his-fault so fas' it soun' like a motorcycle, my shirt-tail had caught on fire an' made de tail-light, an' my two eyes was a shin'in like de spylight on a train.'[135] Such male bravado was typical of prison life, and the Lomaxes went along with such claims. Alan described how Platt 'sang in a voice as clear and big and powerful as any we heard all summer'.[136] In *American Ballads and Folk Songs*, the Lomaxes wrote that Platt sang the song 'Pick a Bale of Cotton' 'with as much vigor as if he could get up the next minute and pick a bale of cotton, and in a half-day'. In the same section, the Lomaxes contradicted themselves by clarifying the implausibility of even a young picker picking an entire bale of cotton in one day.[137] Still, as with many of the old musicians discussed in this dissertation, Platt's actual health, for all his bragging, was not at its best. After Platt was released in 1939, he resorted, like many older unemployed men, to a meagre living on WPA rolls. When applying for jobs, Platt carried around a 'petition', a reference letter written by him with dubious-looking signatures from local dignitaries of his new home in Taylor, Texas. Platt appealed to the sympathies of potential employers by explicitly stating in his 'petition' that he and his wife were 'sick'.[138]

Alan described 'Iron Head' Baker as a 'short grim-faced man of sixty-five, thirty years "off and on" in the penitentiary'. It was Platt who introduced the Lomaxes to Baker and it is notable that in doing so he mentioned his age: 'Old I'un Haid [Iron Head] heah, he know de time when dem kind o' songs mean somepin' in de day when we was rollin' in de fiels fum can to cain't.' In stark contrast to Platt's arrogance about his physical prowess in

[135] Alan Lomax, '"Sinful" Songs of the Southern Negro', 115.
[136] Ibid, 116.
[137] John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax, *American Ballads and Folk Songs*, 231-232.
[138] John A. Lomax, *Adventures of a Ballad Hunter*, 160.

older age, Baker's attitude to escape reflected some of the fatalism characteristic of elderly 'lifers'. On one occasion, some prisoners requested Baker sing 'Shorty George', a song about a prisoner who misses his loved one. Baker told the Lomaxes privately that he would sing the song for them, but only reluctantly as it caused him such emotional anguish to do so that he might try to escape. Unlike Platt, Baker was more realistic about the greater risks prison escape involved for an elderly prisoner: 'I'm a trusty, got an easy job … Ef I run away, dey sho' to catch me an' den dey put me in de line to roll in de fiel' an' I'm too ole fer dat kin' o' wuk.' Alan noted the poignancy of the fact that Baker, who claimed to be 'de roughes nigger dat ever walk de streets of Dallas', cried as he sang the song.[139]

New Orleans

Although the Lomaxes tended to focus on African American music associated with the rural South, one exception was their interest in the sounds of black New Orleans. Although Louisiana provided a rich bounty of folk material for the pair, they were often disappointed by the Crescent City. Alan privately reported to his superior at the Library of Congress that they had found a 'barren field of collection in New Orleans'.[140] During one trip to New Orleans they did encounter 'an old peg-leg Negro man', who told him that that he was a 'reely ole-time songster' if they 'reely wants old-time songs', but 'the old man had little to offer' in terms of the 'authentic' black folk music. The 'old fellow', did, however, speak in creole and regale them with tales of Louisianan 'hoodoo', which pleased the folklorists as they had otherwise found that the police had 'driven out the "hoo-doo" dances', while Creole was 'entirely out of style' amongst young blacks.[141] This nameless informant cut a tragic figure, not least because of his age. 'His life had been and was still hard', Alan explained, 'At seventy-five he has rised to position of cleaner of the

[139] This account comes from Alan Lomax, '"Sinful Songs" of the Southern Negro', 120-121.
[140] Letter from Alan Lomax to Carl Engel, July 1933, Folder 6, Box 1, AFC 1933/001, Lomax Collections, AFC.
[141] Alan Lomax, '"Sinful" Songs of the Southern Negro', 114; Letter from Alan Lomax to Engel, July 1933, AFC 1933/001, Lomax Collections, AFC.

outhouses.'[142] It is possible that this individual inspired Alan to spend an entire day at a 'home for aged Negroes' when he returned to New Orleans in 1937.[143]

Aside from these exceptions, the Lomaxes struggled to find willing aged informants who could play the 'real' black music of New Orleans. There was one aged informant who could help, but he did not live in New Orleans. Jelly Roll Morton had a major influence on jazz in turn-of-the-century New Orleans, but was living unrecognised for his achievements in Washington, D.C. when Alan 'discovered' him running a downtown bar in 1936. Alan recorded an interview-cum-performance of Morton over several days at the Library of Congress. Although only approaching his fifties, Morton faced a variety of health issues, some of which affected his music-making. Alan recalled that Morton's hands were 'a little stiff because of lack of care and very strenuous use.'[144] Around this time, a heart attack hospitalised Morton just as he was about to record commercially for Brunswick.[145] Alan even attempted to downplay Morton's physical deterioration to promoters. To convince organisers of the World's Fair in New York in 1938 to hire Morton to perform at the event, Alan simultaneously had to ensure him that the pianist was old enough to know what he was talking about ('he is well along in his fifties and grew up with jazz as it developed in the tenderloin district of New Orleans'), but young enough that he was 'still a great pianist and a fine singer.'[146] This medical context makes his multiple-hour recording sessions at the Library of Congress all the more impressive, but also complicates the posthumous adulation of Morton's 'laid-back' rhythmic style. Although Morton was still a formidable pianist in

[142] Alan Lomax, '"Sinful" Songs of the Southern Negro', 114.
[143] Letter from Alan Lomax to Harold Spivacke, 30 June 1937, Folder 283, Box 8, 1933/001, Lomax Collections, AFC.
[144] Letter from Alan Lomax to John Hammond, 28 June 1938, Folder 133, Box 4, 1933/001, Lomax Collections, AFC.
[145] John Szwed, 'Doctor Jazz', liner notes to *Jelly Roll Morton: The Complete Library of Congress Recordings by Alan Lomax*, (Rounder Records 11661-188-2PO1, 2005).
[146] Letter from Alan Lomax to Olin Downes, 26 May 1938, Folder 133, Box 4, 1933/001, Lomax Collections, AFC.

1936, he was not at his peak. For Alan, however, the 'lateness' of the musical delivery, such as what he called a 'lazy tempo', became an essential part of the Morton aesthetic.[147]

There were also psychological side effects to Morton's ageing. Jazz promoter Frederick Ramsey Jr. oversaw a Morton recording session for Bluebird in September 1939 which paired the pianist with some younger session players. Ramsey recalled how Morton 'tried to show that he could outdo the younger men', but ultimately did not have the strength to finish the session.[148] Issues of Morton's pride and ego in later life also hung over his Library of Congress recordings. Alan conceded to Hammond that the New Orleans pioneer was 'extremely bitter because of the neglect he has suffered for a number of years and tends to run down other musicians and boast of his own achievements more than is fair to either'.[149]

If some of the fantastical aspects of Morton's account of his life on the Library of Congress recordings can be interpreted as the bitter ramblings of an older man, the role of age in the sessions was not one dimensional. As age scholars show, the forced remembering of the interview context can be particularly painful for older interviewees.[150] Morton, for all his bluster, was not immune to the powerful emotions that reminiscence could induce. At one stage during the recording, Alan's curiosity was piqued by mention of a song that detailed the arrest and death of Robert Charles in New Orleans in 1900. During a racially motivated altercation with the police, Charles shot an officer, sparking a manhunt and race

[147] Alan described Morton's 'lazy tempo' in his biography of the musician, originally published in 1950: Alan Lomax, *Mister Jelly Roll: The Fortunes of Jelly Roll Morton, New Orleans Creole and 'Inventor of Jazz'* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), xix.
[148] Ramsey quote reprinted in John Szwed, 'Doctor Jazz', liner notes to Jelly Roll Morton, *Jelly Roll Morton: The Complete Library of Congress Recordings by Alan Lomax*, (Rounder Records 11661-188-2PO1, 2005).
[149] Letter from Alan Lomax to John Hammond, 6 June 1938, Folder 133, Box 4, 1933/001, Lomax Collection, AFC.
[150] Joanna Bornat, 'Reminiscence and Oral History: Parallel Universes or Shared Endeavour?', *Ageing and Society* 21, no. 2 (2001): 219-241.

riot involving gangs of whites attacking blacks.[151] Although Morton was comfortable talking about other difficult topics, he was not eager to discuss this violent episode in the history of New Orleans race relations. He initially claimed he could not remember the song. After Alan pushed Morton to remember, the pianist changed his reasoning 'I used to know the song, but thought it best to forget it, to be on the peaceful side'. As John Szwed argues, Morton found the experience 'so painfully fresh and immediate that he would not allow himself to recall the song that memorialized the event'.[152] Interestingly, Morton was able to retell the basic narrative of the traumatic events; it was the song itself which caused him unease. The thread that bound together issues of ageing, memory and music-making ultimately placed a bind on what Alan was able to elicit from Morton. Alan's eager, if failed attempts to get the jazz pioneer to sing the song, despite his explicit protestations, also mirrored other ethically questionable efforts he and his father made to draw 'authentic' musical performances from other aged informants by placing them in the throes of emotionally sensitive reminiscence. For example, John wrote that after the elderly Sister Crockett gave a detailed account of her life and religious conversion in San Antonio, she sang in 'in her rich, deep voice, all the more effective because it still was tremulous from the emotions aroused by her own life story.'[153]

Conclusion

The process behind the Lomaxes' recording of aged blacks in the South was shaped by different ideas and realities of ageing. Most often, age was a condition the Lomaxes and other researchers had to navigate around, but which, alongside their ideas of poverty, blackness, southerness, and other forms of 'otherness', came to embody the nobility of 'the

[151] For more on history of the New Orleans race riot, see William Ivy Hair, *Carnival of Fury: Robert Charles and the New Orleans Race Riot of 1900* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008).
[152] John Szwed, 'Doctor Jazz', liner notes to *Jelly Roll Morton: The Complete Library of Congress Recordings by Alan Lomax*, (Rounder Records 11661-188-2PO1, 2005).
[153] John A. Lomax, *Adventures of a Ballad Hunter*, 204.

folk'. Wrinkles, grey hair and even memory loss came to symbolise the passing of time that characterised their frantic scramble to preserve endangered musics. These ideas were not exclusive to their work on African American music, but the racial contexts of the churches, plantations, and prisons they recorded in dovetailed with certain age dynamics to variously make it either harder or easier to record older black informants. Significantly, all of these contexts were 'closed' from the outside (white or modern) world: by pious views of modern life, racial segregation of both religious and working life, or simply by prison walls. Alan even perceived the past New Orleans world drawn from Jelly Roll Morton's flawed but thrilling memory as sealed off from modern influence, not least the old pianist's ambiguity about revisiting certain aspects of that past. For the Lomaxes, the 'old-time negroes' they encountered in the South, generations apart from the 'New Negro' or urban black working class of the 1930s, were also 'isolated' from modernity by virtue of their age. Still, if the age factor had several practical effects and served important symbolic functions, the Lomaxes were not interested in old age per se, despite the fact that some of the music they recorded likely expressed uniquely vernacular ideas about age within African American communities.[154]

Although some of these age-related issues are particular to the Lomaxes' careers, they also mirrored some of experiences of folklorists who preceded and followed them. The jazz revival of the 1940s, inspired in no small part by Morton's Library of Congress recordings, was anchored around the memories of aged black New Orleanians. These themes were picked up in the blues and folk revivals of the 1950s and 1960s, where equally young,

[154] In 1960, for example, Alan recorded Jim Queen singing 'Old Man Can I Have Your Daughter' in Warrenton, Virginia: Alan Lomax and Jim Queen, 'Old Man Can I Have Your Daughter', audio recording, 6 May 1960, Southern States Recording Expedition, 1959-1960, Lomax Collection, AFC, available at http://research.culturalequity.org/get-audio-detailed-recording.do?recordingId=4668, accessed 28 September 2019. Some folklorists, by contrast, were fascinated by vernacular understandings of old age. For example, during Vince Randolph's trips through the Ozarks in the 1930s the folklorist discovered that 'many hillmen believe that the size of a cucumber depends upon the masculine virility of the man who plants the seed - cucumbers planted by a woman or an old man never amount to much': Vance Randolph, 'Ozark Superstitions', *Journal of American Folklore* 46, no. 179 (1933): 14.

white, and mostly male fans of phonograph records travelled through the South to seek out the aged stars of the early 1920s and 1930s roots music.

The lens of age encourages some rethinking of some key aspects of the Lomaxes' powerful legacy on US culture. Their recordings with black churches were shaped by a range of generational circumstances, not least strong associations, real and imagined, between age and faith. Age was a contentious and fluid factor within the racial politics underpinning their trips to southern plantations. While the Lomaxes' recording expeditions in southern penitentiaries are usually associated with their 'discovery' of the middle-aged Lead Belly and the sounds of younger men performing chain gang songs, they were most interested at the time in old 'lifers'. Alan's intimate session with Jelly Roll Morton involved a panoply of age contexts that shaped which stories and songs he recorded. John's senior age had real world consequences for his work as a folklorist. Most significantly, the Lomaxes, by interpreting audio recording as a means of *preservation* and not *desecration* of the traditions of elders, challenged some of the folklore consensus of the early twentieth century. Ironically, by doing so, the folklorists aligned themselves with the worlds of commercial radio and records, where a similar use of technology was employed to venerate elderly southerners.

Conclusion

In 1926, court stenographer, movie scriptwriter, and ballad collector Jean Thomas 'discovered' the blind white fiddler J. W. Day performing outside a courthouse in Ashland, Kentucky. Thomas paid to fix the 68-year-old musician's cataracts before becoming his talent agent, renaming him 'Jilson Setters' and inventing a fictional backstory for him based around the made-up mountain home of 'Lost Hope Hollow'. Setters became a fixture of the 1930s folklore scene through private performances for educated audiences in New York and as a headliner of two folk festivals, each of which featured fiddlers' contests.[1] Setters also performed over radio and made ten commercial phonograph records.[2] In 1931, Setters, who Thomas claimed had never heard of a radio, telephone, or train before she met him, entertained the British King and Queen at London's Royal Albert Hall.[3] In all these environments, Setters was presented as a rustic, aged relic of a bygone era.[4] As well as a

[1] Setters was considered the main 'drawing power' of the 1933 American Folk Song Festival, a small event held for mostly for well-to-do guests in the back garden of Thomas' Kentucky home. A year later, the *Journal of American Folklore* reported that the 'seventy-seven year old "singin' fiddler" … brought the music of the hills and the "hollers" of the mountains' to the newly established National Folk Festival at the Municipal Auditorium in St. Louis, Missouri (evidently his actual age was lost by this point). It is unclear if Setters entered the fiddlers' contests at either festival: Lillian Freeman Wright, 'America's National Folk Festival, 1934', *Journal of American Folklore* 47, no. 184/185 (1934): 263; 'American Folk Song Festival', *Arcadian Life*, 2 June 1935, 7-8.

[2] In 1928, Setters performed over from the Roxy in New York, with the performance broadcast supposedly to 'tens of millions' over WJZ and syndicated stations elsewhere in the country: 'Radio Review', *Daily News* [New York], 19 February 1928, 54. For the Setters discography, see Discography of American Historical Recordings, 'Jilson Setters (instrumentalist: violin),' www.adp.library.ucsb.edu/index.php/talent/detail/4992/Setters_Jilson_instrumentalist_violin , accessed 20 August 2019.

[3] Perhaps significantly, Maud Karpeles, the British collector who had accompanied Cecil Sharp to document the ballads of elderly Appalachians in the 1910s, helped secure Setters' London concert through the English Folk Dance and Song Society concert at the Royal Albert Hall: Jean Thomas, *The Singin' Fiddler of Lost Hope Hollow* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1938), 2.

[4] Considering his multi-faceted career trajectory, it is no shock that Setters has attracted the attention of scholars of southern music. A selection of scholarly works that pay special attention to Setters includes Bill C. Malone and Tracey Laird, *Country Music U.S.A*, 50th Anniversary Edition (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018), 18; Charles Wolfe, *Kentucky Country: Folk and Country Music of Kentucky* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2015) 67-71; Richard A Peterson, *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity*

reminder that different domains of southern roots music, namely fiddlers' contests, records and radio, and folklore studies, were not isolated silos, but interconnected fields, the Setters saga is something of a collage of some of the key themes discussed throughout this dissertation.

'Uncle' Setters, as he became known, appeared at the American Folk Song Festival like a doting grandparent, sat onstage in a hickory chair while children performed various folk dances.[5] The seemingly ancient musician clashed humorously with modern music media. The inner sleeve of *The Singin' Fiddler of Lost Hope Hollow*, a Thomas-penned biography from 1938, features an illustration of a wrinkled, bemused Setters in front of a radio microphone. In a captioned quote, Setters bemoans that during his on-air appearance the producer put sound-proofing rugs under his foot to obscure the sound of his heel keeping time.[6] With the same commanding seniority as Uncle Dave Macon, Setters asked the producer to remove the distracting 'contrapshun' (microphone) which looked like a 'little fryin' pan'. In 1937, John Lomax recorded Setters for the Library of Congress at Thomas's home. On the recordings, Setters and Thomas emphasise his age and the antiquity of his repertoire.[7] On one song Setters sings a ballad on the theme of old age. In others, it is clear that the old musician is both hard-of-hearing and struggling to bow his fiddle.[8] Most

(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997) 62-63; Anthony Harkins, *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) 91.

[5] 'American Folk Song Society Holds Annual Festival Near Ashland', *Courier-Journal* [Louisville, KY], 26 June 1932, 49; Sally Stuart, 'She Came to Town to Practice Funeralizin'', *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 6 March 1932, 15.

[6] Jean Thomas, *The Singin' Fiddler of Lost Hope Hollow* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1938), 2.

[7] Before Setters performs 'No Corn On Tigert' he proudly reveals he had learnt the tune '*many* years ago'. On 'Dr. Humphrey's Jig', Jean Thomas can be heard introducing the number as a very 'rare' and 'old' tune, likely in an obvious attempt to 'sell' Setters to Lomax. On 'Blind Man's Lament', Thomas describes Setters as 'over seventy' and reminds listeners that 'of course, he cannot read or write'. John Lomax, Jilson Setters and Jean Thomas, 'No Corn On Tigert', Ashland, Kentucky, 1937, AFS 01019 B01, Lomax Collections, AFC; 'Dr. Humphrey's Jig', AFS 01019 B02; 'Blind Man's Lament', AFS 01018 B.

[8] The lyrics to 'The Blind Man's Lament' touch upon an old age theme: the elderly narrator promises to spend the 'last days of his life' with his loved one. On 'Lovely Nancy', Setters bows notes sloppily and occasionally misses the string entirely. On the 'The Blind Man's

bizarrely, but not at odds with her wider curation of folk imaginaries, at least once Thomas dressed up as a 'Granny' character at a live event.[9]

Setters' story and the paradoxes within it resonate with some of the key tensions explored in this dissertation: between tradition and modernity, older and younger generations, debilitation and rejuvenation, embodied age and disembodied sound, authenticity and masquerade, country and city, and artist and mediator. Similar threads join up superficially distinct stories within this history. In the 1920s, the elderly Confederate veteran and fiddler Henry C. Gilliland travelled to Mineral Wells, Texas to bathe in the healing waters to combat his ill health. These same wells were exploited by the Crystal Crazy Waters company, who later sponsored radio programming that featured songs about old age. In the 1930s, Lonnie Wilson became 'Pap' for Roy Acuff's band. Acuff learnt his craft from old fiddlers at fiddlers' conventions but also recorded a song critical of pensions. Politicians from across the South and across the political spectrum (but particularly state governors), along with dozens of small and large businesses, selling everything from life insurance to tobacco, associated themselves with the old age imaginaries and aged performers found in roots music. The 'quavery' quality of the aged voices of performers as distinct as the white Kentuckian Granny Harper and elderly ex-slaves appealed and continue to fascinate equally distinct audiences in the South and beyond. For all this veneration of elders, however, hundreds of thousands of southerners and Americans during these years also enjoyed pejorative, comedic representations of the elderly on records, onstage, on-air, and in the press. More than merely coincidences, collectively these connections illustrate the existence of a wider structure of feeling about the 'aged South' in the early twentieth century

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Lament', Thomas has to speak extra loudly for the hard-of-hearing Setters to hear her song request. John Lomax, Jilson Setters and Jean Thomas, 'Lovely Nancy', audio recording, 1937, AFS 01016 B02, Lomax Collections, AFC; 'No Corn On Tigert', 1937, AFS 01019 B01; 'Dr. Humphrey's Jig', AFS 01019 B02; 'Blind Man's Lament', AFS 01018 B.

[9] Thomas performed as 'Granny' as part of a dramatised rendition of an Elizabethan ballad at the 1933 American Folk Song Festival. This character seems to have been similar to her more frequent 'mountain woman' characterisation, the 'Traipsin' Woman': 'American Folk Song Festival Held At Cabin On Mayo Trail', *Courier-Journal* [Louisville, KY], 13 June 1932, 4.

that, if adapted to different contexts, was partly produced and sustained in the domain of roots music.

In this respect, while demonstrating that age was a key factor in the development of roots music, this dissertation also argues that roots music (re)produced a diverse set of ideas about old age that influenced southern society and beyond. Most of these ideas were shaped in some way by the three significant historical contexts laid out at the beginning of this study: a new set of age dynamics; various 'crises' of modernity in the South; and the rise of mass mediated roots music. Often, representations of old age in roots music reflected those of the wider society that increasingly defined the winter years of life as of unwanted decline. In other ways, however, southern roots music strayed from this senescence narrative by 'reviving' a supposedly 'premodern' deference for the elderly and a sense of 'purpose' in later life. The coexistence of these contradictory beliefs about old age reflect some of the ambiguities of the era about age, modernity and roots music. This dissertation also shows that within the worlds of early roots music lay nascent ideas about the 'grey dollar', the 'grey vote', and 'grey power', amongst other new ways of thinking about age that would become more pronounced later in the twentieth century. However, if southern musical culture is a useful venue to expand historical understandings of old age in the early twentieth century US, the age frame is most incisive in providing fresh perspectives on the powerful forces of class, gender, race, sexuality, religion, and regional identities that were so ingrained in southern society and roots music. In difference circumstances, and with varying results, the tropes of old age could be used to reinforce or challenge these various orthodoxies.

Through real or fictional elders, producers and audiences of southern roots music could tap into certain visions of the past in order to understand the political, socio-economic, and cultural changes underway in the present. This thesis shows that the elderly were key symbolic figures in establishing, understanding, and occasionally confronting sentiments about such transitions. Audiences 'listened' to the aged in roots music in order to grasp what

Marshal Berman calls the 'maelstrom of modernity', to help distinguish between past and present, and occasionally to help draw the lines between white and black culture, femininity and masculinity, rural and urban life, or southern and American identity.[10] In some respects, this was an era in which such distinctions were solidified, legally as well as culturally. In other ways, however, new social forces gathering pace and power during this period also blurred such categorical differences or destroyed them entirely. The paradoxical newness *and* agedness of southern roots music echoed some of the contradictions of these new social realties.

In 1952, Jilson Setters' 1932 recording of 'Wild Wagoner' was included on record collector Harry Smith's landmark compilation, *Anthology of American Music*, a long-play reissue album that was a key 'text' of the postwar roots music revival. Music critic Greil Marcus famously explained the appeal of Smith's *Anthology* for many white, urban, northern, and middle-class audiences laying in its voyeuristic ability to allow listeners to glimpse at 'the old, weird America'. Most of the artists on the LP were *young* musicians in the 1920s and 1930s. For the most part, listeners were satisfied consuming music recorded during the seemingly 'alien' interwar era.[11] The appeal of the *Anthology* recordings for their target audience partly boiled down to a kind of cultural eavesdropping into seemingly 'extra-terrestrial' lives of poor, southern, black, or rural Americans, but temporality was also a factor. Despite the possibilities of 'time-travel' via old recorded roots music, many young revivalists also turned their attentions to elders, once they discovered that many of those

[10] Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience Of Modernity*, Ninth Edition (London: Verso Books, 2009), 345–346. The thinking here also builds on new ideas about modernity from the discipline of sound studies: Michael Denning, *Noise Uprising: The Audiopolitics of a World Musical Revolution* (London: Verso Books, 2015); Emily Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900-1933* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2004); Mark M. Smith, *Listening to Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University North Carolina Press, 2001).

[11] It is possible that some of the more informed fans were particularly enamoured by the aged artists on the compilation, such as Jilson Setters and Uncle Dave Macon, but most fans would have been unaware of the backgrounds of the artists they heard.

singers from the *Anthology* were in fact still alive.[12] Many of those they found were retired, rusty, or run down, yet able to play a vital role in the revival. The *aged*, weird America (or South) once again took centre stage.[13]

[12] Arguably, one central feature of the postwar roots music revival was to use recordings, as much as elders, to hear what R. Murray Schafer calls 'soundscapes past': R. Murray Schafer, *Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, Second Edition (Rochester, Vermont: Destiny Books, 2011), 5-12.
[13] Greil Marcus, 'The Old, Weird America', liner notes to Various Artists, *Anthology of American Music,* (Smithsonian Folkways SFW40090, 1997) compact disc.

Appendix

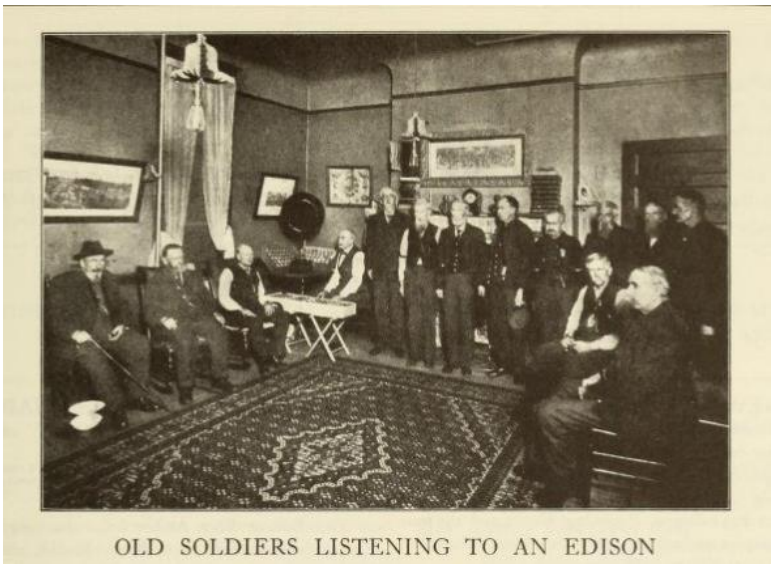
1.1: Illustration of an old fiddler on his way to a fiddlers' convention for a 1907 newspaper column (left).

1.2: Illustration advertising 1927 Georgia Old Fiddlers' Convention (right).

1.3: Old Fiddlers' Contest featuring rare appearance of an African American fiddler (second from right), Fort Worth, Texas, 1901.

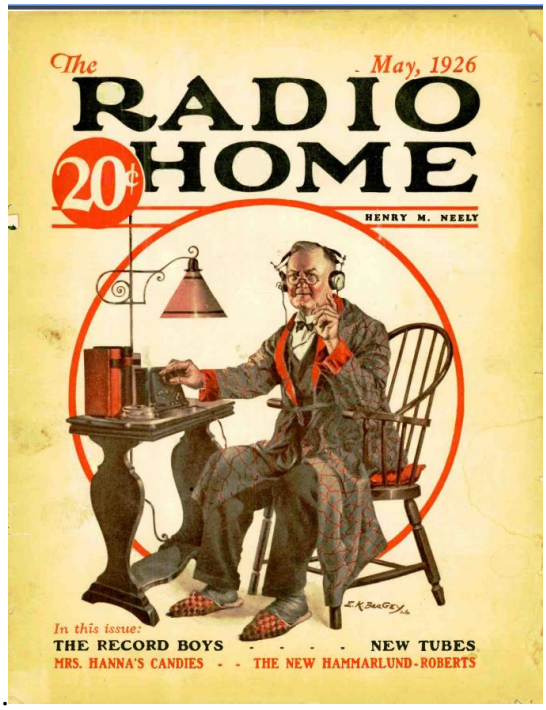
2.1: Vocalion record sleeve, c. 1928.

2.2: Advertisement for Brown radio receivers.



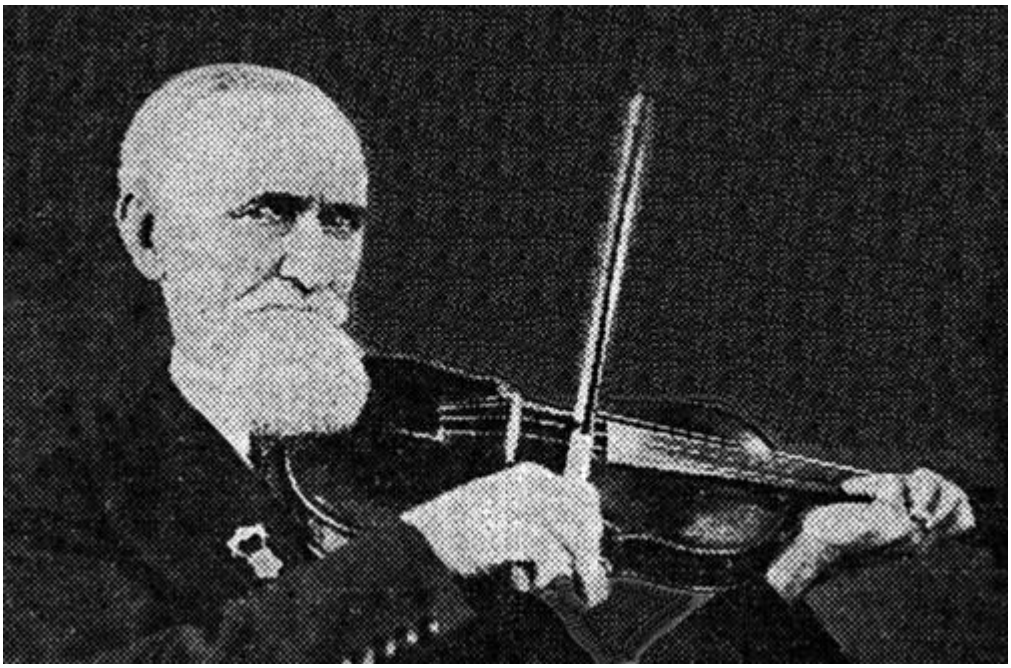
2.3: Old Soldiers listening to an Edison phonograph player.

2.4: Front cover of March 1926 issue of *Radio In The Home*.

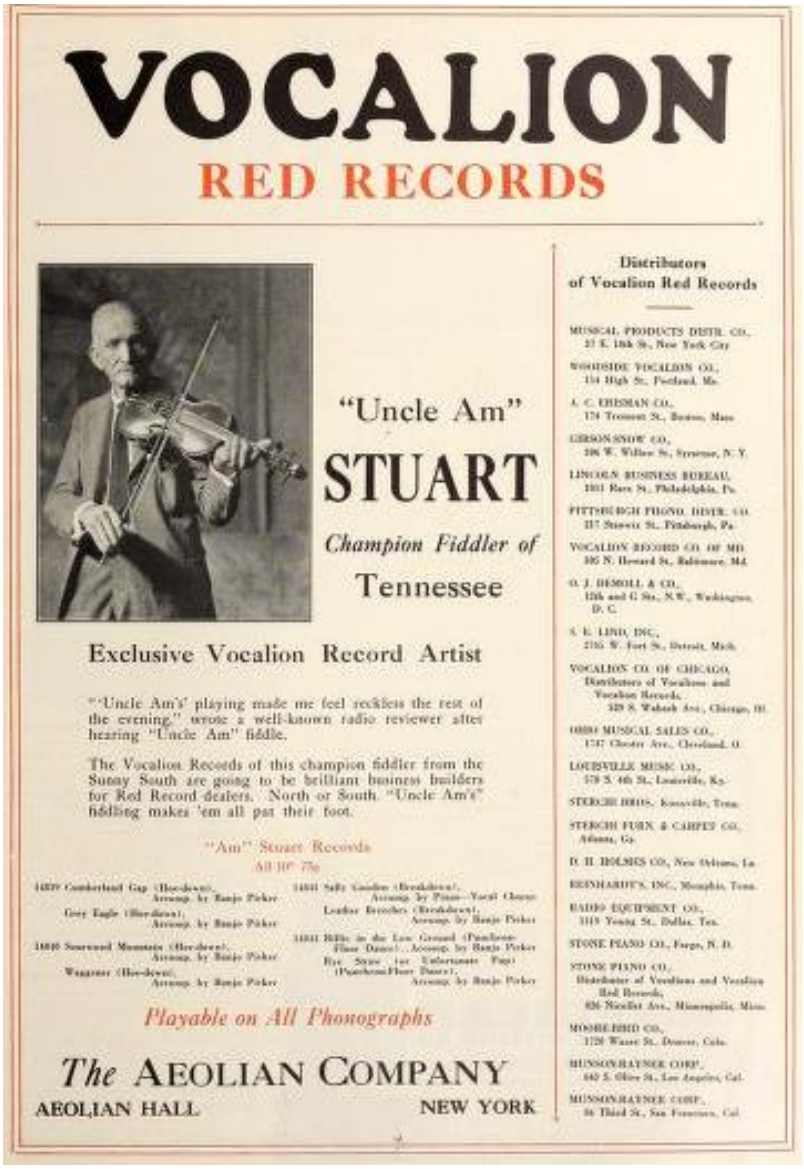


2.5: Front cover of May 1926 issue of *Radio In The Home*.

2.6: Capt. Moses J. Bonner (second from left) and his children during the First World War.



2.7: Photograph of Capt. Moses J. Bonner with military medal in *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, advertising performances over WBAP (Fort Worth, Texas).



2.8: Vocalion advertisement for Uncle Am Stuart.

2.9: Publicity photograph of Uncle Jimmy Thompson with niece Eva Thompson (left).

2.10: Cartoon of Uncle Jimmy Thompson (right).

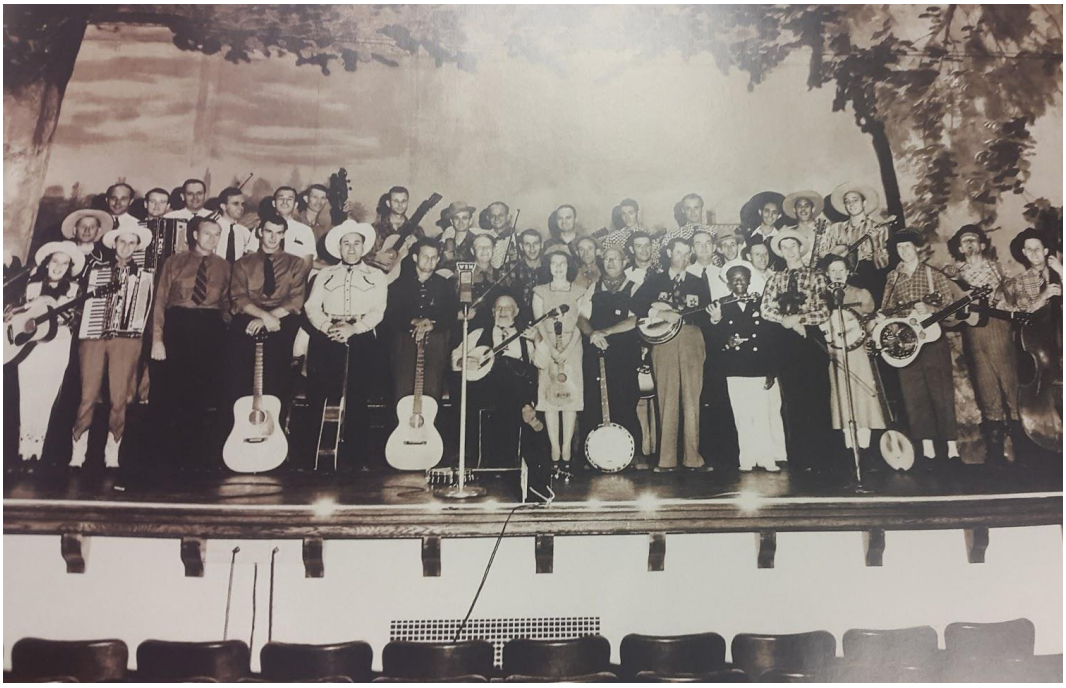
2.11: Iconic photograph of WSM announcer George Hay and Uncle Jimmy Thompson.

2.12: A mule wagon given to Uncle Dave Macon as a gift from his fans.

2.13: Still from the *Grand Ole Opry* movie, featuring Uncle Dace Macon with banjo.

2.14: 29-year-old senator-elect Rush D. Holt (middle) and Uncle Dave Macon (right).

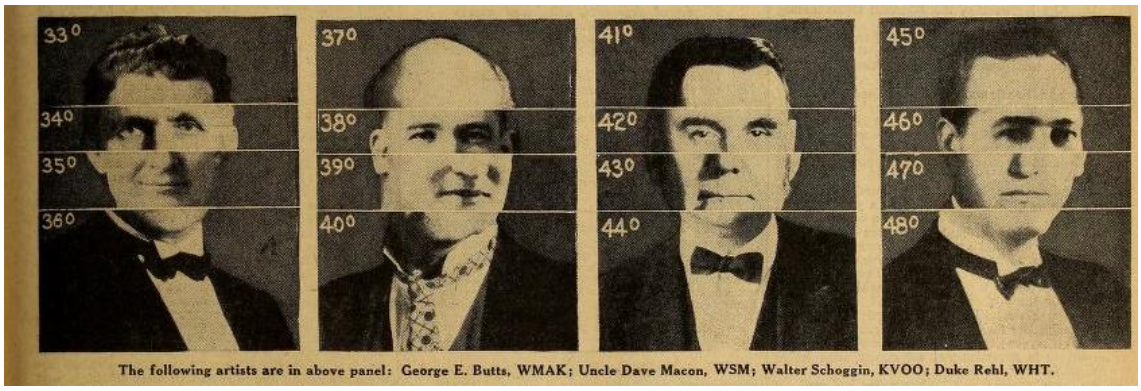
2.15: Uncle Dave Macon performs with Rachel Veach sat his knee.



2.16: Uncle Dave Macon (seated at front) with *Grand Ole Opry* cast.

2.17: Uncle Dave Macon publicity photograph in *Radio Digest*.

2.18: Uncle Dave Macon with packet of Prince Albert tobacco, sponsors of the *Grand Ole Opry*.



2.19: *Radio Digest* jigsaw puzzle, featuring Uncle Dave Macon.

2.20: Postcard of Granny Harper fishing for ‘A Big One’ in Renfro Creek, 1940.

2.21: Publicity photograph of Granny Harper.

2.22 Granny Harper and two children on set of *Renfro Valley Barn Dance.*

2.23: Granny Harper dancing on stage with cast of *Renfro Valley Barn Dance*.

2.24: Granny Harper dancing with Slim Miller and band on *Renfro Valley Barn Dance*.

2.25: The broadcast wedding anniversary of Ma and Pa McCormick (left).

2.26: Signed photograph, Ma and Pa McCormick (right).

2.27: WLW's *Top O' The Morning* cast, with Ma and Pa McCormick seated on left.

3.1**:** Uncle Henry (third from left) with reading glasses and cane, along with his band, the Kentucky Mountaineers.

3.2: Grandpa Jones publicity photograph (left).

3.3: Oscar Stone and His Possum Hunters featuring old-timer act Warren L. Liggett on banjo (right).

3.4: Sarie ‘does a sachet as Sam McGee does an old-time jig’ onstage at the *Grand Ole Opry*.


(right), who di-
rs." For many
as a vaudeville
circuit. He was
Bern, N. C., and
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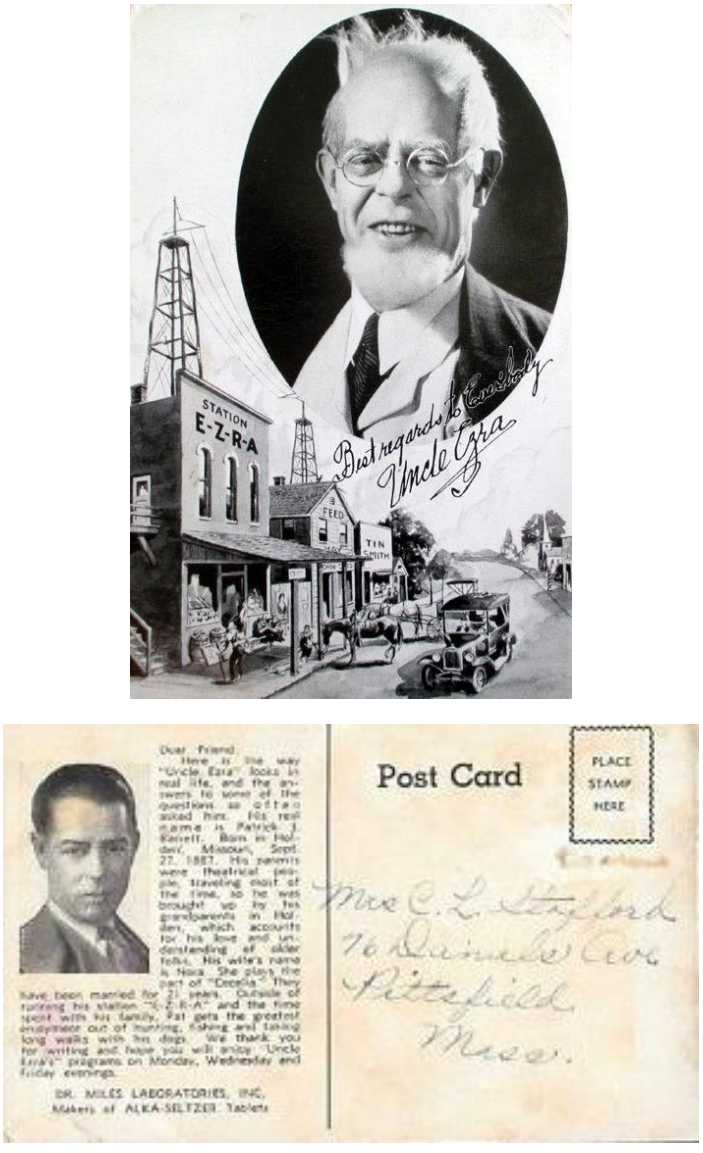
3.5: Aunt Sarah, performer over KWK from St. Louis, Missouri (left).

3.6: Uncle Rufe whittling wood (right).



3.7: Uncle Ezra, Alka-Seltzer-sponsored postcard, front and back.

RURAL RADIO *for May*

THEY DIDN'T BELIEVE UNCLE EZRA COULD FARM!

By EDYTHE DIXON

When Uncle Ezra settled down to farming, the neighbors for miles and miles around laughed and laughed. What does a radio star know about farming? Speculations as to how soon the venture would flop comprised most of the conversation on the farms around Hebron, Illinois, in the vicinity of Pat "Ezra" Barrett's first farm. But when the beloved "sage of Rosedale" made his 90-acre stock farm pay to the extent that he could buy another 200-acre farm with the dividends, their laughter turned to cheers.

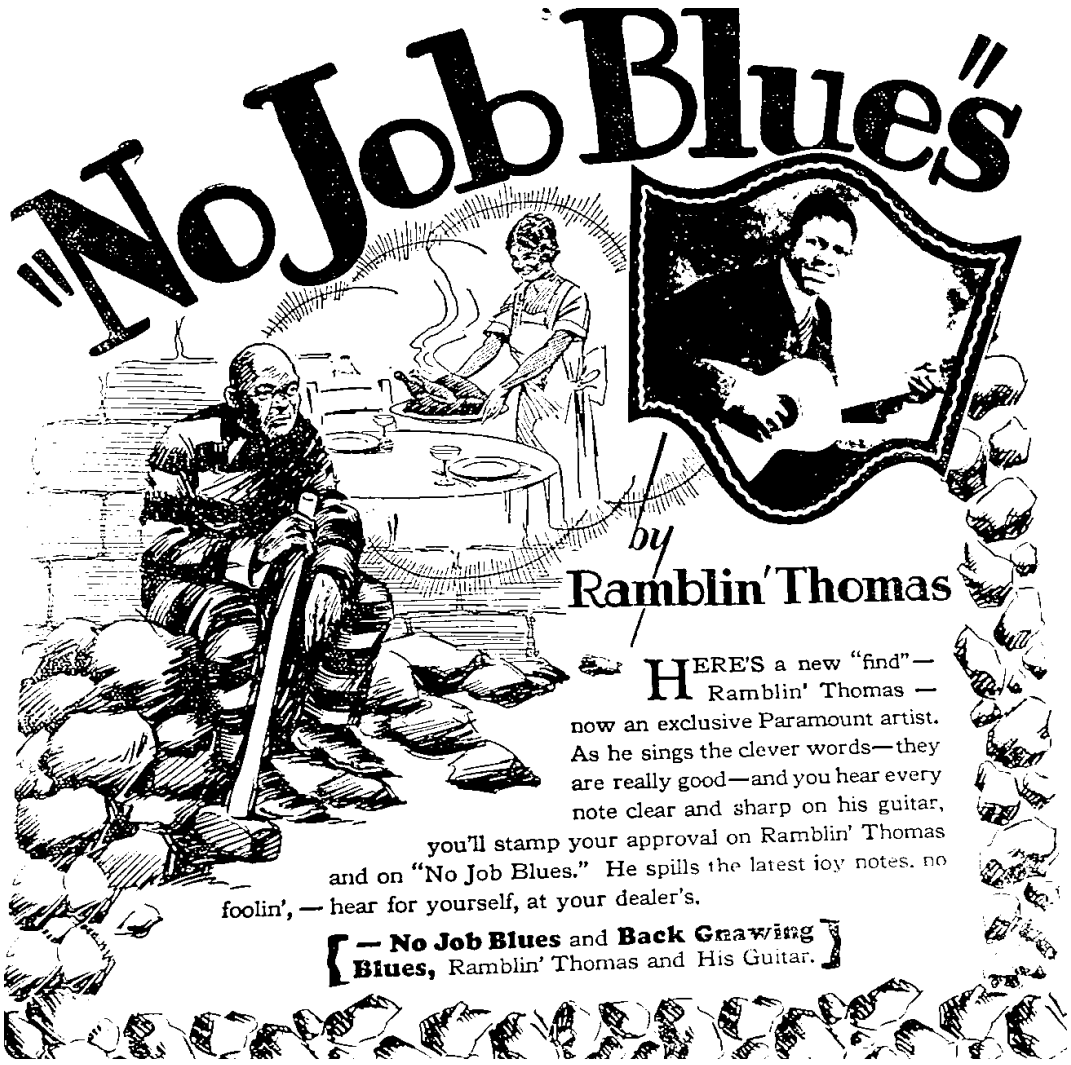
All of which means that NBC's own Uncle Ezra recently purchased his second big country place, a thriving dairy farm located just a stone's throw from the good earth he bought in northern Illinois a couple of years ago.

Dairy Farm with 60 Head

Stocked with 60 head of fine Holstein cattle, Pat's new place already is operating successfully as a dairy. Three miles away, his first farm, originally purchased as a sort of stepping-off place between radio broadcasts, is operating as a cattle breeding farm, with 19 head of purebred Guernsey cows on hand and a budget set aside for twice that number to be bought in the near future.

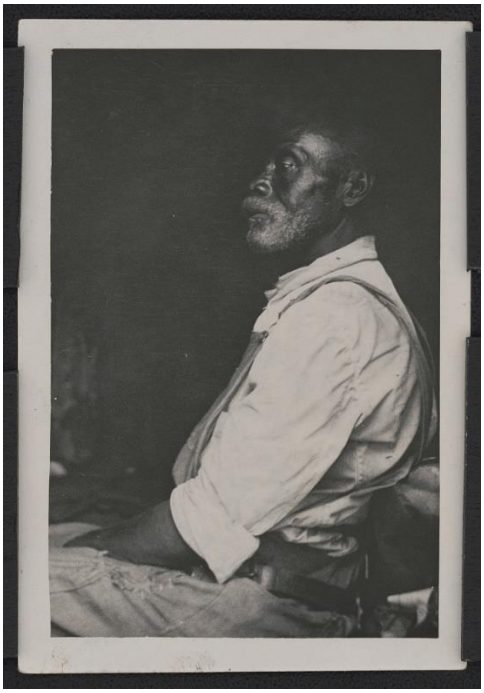
WLS's Uncle Ezra is now a real dirt farmer!

3.8: Pat Barrett as Uncle Ezra running a real-life farm.



4.1: Paramount Records advertisement for Ramblin' Thomas' 'No Job Blues'.

4.2: Paramount Records advertisement for Norfolk Quartette's 'I'm Going Through'.



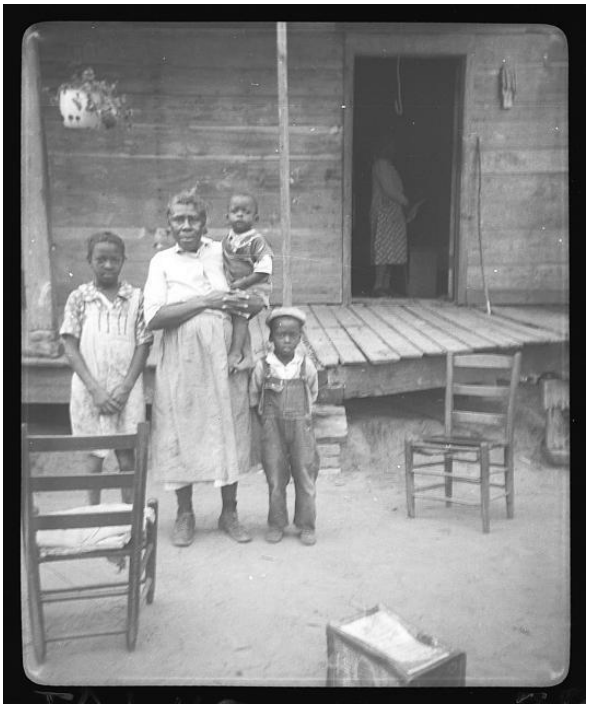
5.1: Sam ‘Dad’ Ballard (left).

5.2: Old ‘ballet’ seller of New Iberia, Louisiana with her daughter (right).

5.3: Wallace Quarterman (left).

5.4: Rev. J. R. Gipson (right).

5.5: Uncle Bob Ledbetter at his granddaughter's home, near Mooringsport, Louisiana.



5.6: Aunt Harriett McClintock at her home near Sumterville, Alabama, with great grandchildren.

5.7: Aunt Harriett McClintock at the microphone with John A. Lomax, Sr., Mrs. Ruby Pickens Tartt, and Aunt Harriett's ‘great-grands’ children.

5.8: Aunt Harriet McClintock, dancing for John A. Lomax, Sr., as she sings ‘Shing, Shing’ at the crossroads near Sumterville, Alabama.

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Billboard

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